

AMBASSADOR ANNE COX CHAMBERS

Interviewed by: Ann Miller Morin

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Q: Would you tell me a little about your father, Ambassador Chambers? He was the Governor of Ohio, you said.

CHAMBERS: Yes, he was Governor of Ohio, three times. Before that he served in Congress, and before our next meeting, I'll bring his autobiography because that has dates. He was born on a farm in Jacksonsбург, Ohio. He was a child of his parents' middle age. He was the youngest of seven and his brothers and sisters were all quite a few years older than he. He really had no formal education at all. He went to the one-room schoolhouse in Jacksonsбург, and his first job, at the age of fourteen, was the janitor of the school. And my aunt, after whom I'm named, Anne Cox Baker, was married to John Baker who owned the newspaper in Middletown, Ohio, which was very near Jacksonsбург, and that is how my father got into the newspaper business.

Q: He also ran for president in 1920?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: With FDR as his vice president?

CHAMBERS: He ran on President Wilson's hope of the US joining the League of Nations. That was the platform because my father believed that if the US was not a member the League could not survive, which, of course, is what happened. And he received letters all the rest of his life, saying if he had been elected, perhaps there wouldn't have been a second world war.

Q: What about your mother? Was she an Ohioan also?

CHAMBERS: No, she was born in Pittsburgh, but grew up in Chicago. She was twenty years younger than my father and she was my father's second wife. We were his second family. She always said that even when they were first married he had so much energy, she couldn't keep up. And people are constantly saying to me: "You have so much energy. How do you explain it?" I really think it's genes. Now people say, "How do you move around as much as you do?" It's motivation. I really want to dance every dance. I also attribute yoga. I really do.

Q: And the meditation part of it also?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Was your mother the typical homemaker of that period?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: She did not have an outside career?

CHAMBERS: No, not at all. Her life really was centered on my father completely. She had outside interests, certainly. She worked purely as a volunteer and purely when these activities could be worked in. She insisted on always being at home when my father arrived.

Q: How many siblings did you have, did you grow up with?

CHAMBERS: I have one sister three years younger, and a half brother who was eighteen years older.

Q: Oh, is that so? So you couldn't have had too much to do -

CHAMBERS: No, because he was away at school.

Q: What about your childhood, growing up? What sort of a little girl were you?

CHAMBERS: Painfully shy.

Q: Painfully shy?



CHAMBERS: Painfully shy. Awkward. I was the ugly duckling, really. My sister was totally the opposite. Very outgoing, very sure of herself; a show-off. Very well coordinated, marvelous at athletics. I was hopeless. She was small for her size, and I was this same height when I was twelve years old, so I towered over the boys in dancing school, and that made me feel even more awkward. I've always said that the reason that I have bad posture is, I tried to hide behind my mother. She was a little shorter.

Q: Given this rivalry which existed probably from the time your sister was aware of you, did you play together much?

CHAMBERS: I don't know if you would call it "playing." It seemed to me we fought a lot. She was a tomboy and I remember in those days there were dolls with China heads and someone brought us each one, and I remember they were beautifully dressed as a baby doll. I really loved my doll. Well, my sister broke hers the first day, dropped it and broke it, and somehow, later on, she got mine and broke it.

Q: The same thing happened to me. My mother made her give me hers, because my older sister broke mine, too. So you were rather a quiet little girl?

CHAMBERS: Oh, really painfully shy.

Q: You've certainly overcome it. Did you like to read a lot?

CHAMBERS: Very much.

Q: And stay in a corner and do imaginary things?

CHAMBERS: I did. As a matter of fact, that's strange your mentioning that. I had an imaginary family. My best friend was named "Evelyn Pitts". That really sounds goofy, but my sister said for years I fooled her. I would come in and say, "Oh, come on, you have to get dressed. We're going to the Pitts' house for lunch." She said she fell for it for quite a while. When she told her children later on, this bizarre story, they thought it was so funny they named animals after my imaginary story.

Q: Obviously, you had a very powerful imagination. Did you admire your father tremendously?

CHAMBERS: I was scared of him.

Q: Authoritarian, was he? Pretty strict?

CHAMBERS: He was almost 50 when I was born and he was an imposing figure. A great friend of mine who was married to an in-law said not long ago, "It must have been difficult not to have had sort of a normal father." He was loving, but he was awfully busy. He enjoyed his grandchildren very much and did spend far more time with them than with us.

Q: He'd given up some of his activities?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Did your parents live to be a good old age?

CHAMBERS: My father died when he was 87. When he went to get life insurance, they ask, you know, what age were your parents, grandparents, brothers. They said they had never had such a total of years. My mother used to say, "I'm glad I'm not a Cox; you all live too damned long." And my aunt Anne, when she was 92, called my father one day and said: "I just want to say goodbye. I'm going to California tomorrow." And he said, "Oh, that's wonderful. Why are you going?" She said, "Well, you know, I just always wanted to see that part of the country and I don't have anything really pressing the next couple of weeks." He said, "Well, that's fine. Who's going with you?" "With me? I don't want to be bothered." And she went on the train. She died when she was 94. My mother died when she was 70, but she died in an accident. She died in a fire at her house.

Q: Oh, dear.

CHAMBERS: So, who knows how long . . .

Q: Were your folks churchgoing people? Did they send you to Sunday school?



CHAMBERS: Yes, we went to Sunday school. I would say that Mother was a religious, spiritual person, but Daddy said most of the sermons he heard were made by damned fools. He just couldn't tolerate it. But we did go to Sunday school. We went to a small church in a suburb of Dayton. The man who was the minister was a very profound influence on my life. His name was Herman Page. These would have been years, eight to eleven or twelve. I looked forward to his sermons. I can't remember what he said, but he made an impression on me, and I had one Sunday school teacher who was also a friend of mother, and I really loved her. I just remember her as a very caring, spiritual person.

We also had a woman, well, you call her a nanny now-she came when I was three weeks old and stayed until I was fourteen. She was from a German background, a very devout Catholic, that sort of peasant-type Catholic. She, unfortunately, instilled in me an awful kind of conscience. Really, it has taken almost my whole life. Guilt feelings, and I remember two types of sins: there was mortal sin and venial. It's taken me a long time.

Q: Mr. Page, who was your minister, was he the sort of figure your father was?

CHAMBERS: Not at all.

Q: Do you think you were looking toward a man's influence in your life, since your Dad was always so busy?

CHAMBERS: I've never thought of that. No, I would say he was a much more humble man. He went on to become a bishop. We went to his Episcopal Church and I certainly became firmly an Episcopalian. I was confirmed in that church.

Q: Do you think this was one of the reasons why you have been so interested in philanthropy?

CHAMBERS: Possibly. I believe that family background influence is important. My parents were both very caring people. Mother, during the depression, and I was pretty young then, she was giving milk and I used to go with her. I used to go with Mother every morning, and people would come with pails, and we would ladle out milk.

My father was - I guess he had very much a reporter's mind. He was interested in every person he met. He hated to come to New York, and whenever he did have to, he stayed at the Waldorf Towers. He came in one day, and the maid was bustling around. He used to call: "Well, hello, girly; what's your name?" He would find out how many children, and he found out one of his employees' child had terrible teeth and he said, "You've got to get those straightened." "Oh, its too expensive." So Daddy did that.



Well, anyway, the story I started to tell you about the Waldorf Towers-he'd chat with her every day, and she said, "Oh, Governor, what a change in this apartment from last week." And, of course, he was very curious as to who was there. She said, "Ambassador Kennedy was here, and it was full of whores and bicarbonate of soda." He loved that story.

Oh, countless young people he helped through college. In fact, Scotty Reston was the son of the greenskeeper at the Moraine golf club. I remember old Mr. Reston; he was a wonderful old Scot, and Scotty was Daddy's caddy when he was a little boy. He came to have lunch with me when I first arrived in Brussels, and he said, "You know, I was in my senior year of college when the Depression came. There was just no way I could continue. This was a terrible tragedy for me." He said, "Your father loaned me \$500 and that enabled me to finish. That's sounds like such a small sum, but," he said, "believe me, there was no other way." His first job was with Daddy's newspaper in the Dayton Daily News. He said, "You know, your father never forgave me for leaving the Dayton News for the New York Times." My son was there that day and I was so pleased for him to be there. He asked Jim if he was a golfer, and Jim said, "Not yet," and he said, "Your grandfather cheated. He used to give himself putts that long."

Q: So from your earliest memories, it was a part of the fabric of your family's life to help other people?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Well, that certainly would have a very long-lasting influence. What about your grandparents?

CHAMBERS: My maternal grandfather died when I was five and I have sort of a vague memory of a kindly man with a mustache, but very vague.

Q: Were both your parents of English descent?

CHAMBERS: Mother is Scottish. And one Swiss. My great-grandfather was.

Q: You were actually the middle child but, in effect, the oldest of two?

CHAMBERS: Yes.



Q: Did you ever have any childhood illnesses that affected you; that is, you had to stay out of school a long time?

CHAMBERS: No.

Q: Did your sister?

CHAMBERS: No; she was more prone to bronchitis; no.

Q: No serious illnesses? Did your parents ever lose a child?

CHAMBERS: Yes. My mother had a little boy the year before I was born and he died very soon of pneumonia. I was born just before the campaign of 1920. The pictures of mother and me! She was really very fat, and I was, too. She said she was so afraid of losing a child the second time that she wanted to nurse me. She was told she should drink a lot of hot chocolate, and so she did get very fat immediately.

Q: Undoubtedly, that must have had a profound effect, the fact that your mother wanted this baby so badly.

CHAMBERS: The little boy died of pneumonia when he was less than a week old, something that happens so often.

Q: Was your mother very protective of her children?

CHAMBERS: I guess so and I always felt that my sister was the favorite child. I've said it to Barbie, and she has said, "Oh, heavens, no, because mother worried so about you. She thought you needed bringing out." "Well," I said, "that isn't complimentary at all; it's almost making me sound like a retarded child." I did not consider it a compliment that she didn't need any.

My sister said she worried about what would happen to me if mother died. I did feel a loss for a while, but I really feel that I did not bloom, or whatever you call it, until after my mother died. And I was afraid that this would be the case with my older daughter, my oldest child, but an illness that she has, I feel, has changed that.

Q: Were you really sickly as a child?

CHAMBERS: No; I was just shy and awkward as I say. I always had good friends. I never was a leader, or outgoing, but all of my life I've had, wherever I've been, a few really good friends. I was not a friendless child in spite of the shyness.

Q: To what do you attribute this shyness?

CHAMBERS: I don't know. I really don't. I don't know if the birth of my sister-at times we can be quite compatible; other times totally not. She said once, "It must have been very difficult for you to have me as a sister." And it was.

Q: She felt that your mother preferred you and you felt that your mother preferred her?

CHAMBERS: I think it was just fighting. It was just two sisters fighting. I went away to school when I was twelve, so there weren't too many years at home, really.

Q: Were you compared by your parents, one to the other?

CHAMBERS: No; there was never any comparison. The only thing, I was a good student and I really liked to study, and that pleased my father. But he really took it for granted. I was on the honor roll, but if my sister even passed one grade, that was a celebration. Mother used to say that he was proud of her athletic ability and proud of my scholastic ability. I remember, though, him telling me once, when I was a little girl in grammar school, that if we ever failed a grade it would be a disgrace. And that frightened me so that I really worked. It didn't bother my sister at all. And we're the same zodiac sign.

Q: Really, Sagittarius?

CHAMBERS: Yes; but, of course, one's rising sign is really as important.

Q: What is your rising sign?

CHAMBERS: Scorpio.

Q: You went away to school. This would be a girl's preparatory school?



CHAMBERS: There was only the public school in Dayton and Mother didn't feel that was adequate. So my father, in the early '20s, bought the newspaper in Miami. Carl Fisher, who developed Miami Beach, persuaded him to come down just to see it, and he fell in love with it and felt he wanted to build a house there. But he could never be anywhere without working, so he bought a very small newspaper. So we spent winters there.

We would begin school in Dayton and then go down for the winter and then finish the year. I do remember Mother saying I didn't have any trouble with that at all, but my sister did. Anyway, she felt when I was twelve I should be the whole year in one school, so I boarded at a school in Miami until my parents came down, and then I would live at home while they were there, and then I would go back. I did that for two years, and then, when I was fourteen, I went to Holton Arms School in Washington for one year. That was because, from the moment that I was born, it was assumed that I was going to the school that my mother had gone to: Miss Porter's. My granddaughter is the fifth generation of my mother's family [to go there]. As I say, it was just assumed. There really was no argument about whether we wanted to. We were never asked. I remember one summer when there seemed to be something going on in the house and the next morning we were told we were going to camp.

Q: Did your parents give you anything to strive for? That is, did they say, "When Anne grows up she's going to be a . . ."

CHAMBERS: No. One of my roommates in boarding school and I were discussing that. There were three of us who roomed together and we all had two daughters almost the same age. We were talking about the differences, and Amanda said, "Nobody ever told us to be somebody, so we weren't." Miss Porter's school was then a finishing school. It was not even college preparatory. I think I wish I had gone to college. We weren't even thinking of that. I certainly had nothing in mind, and I was married when I was twenty. Most of us were when we were pretty young.

I always liked to write and I remember dreaming this-all the kids do-that I would like to write books and win a Pulitzer prize.

Q: Do you write at all?

CHAMBERS: No, I really don't. I write letters.

Q: You haven't written the story of your days as Ambassador?



CHAMBERS: No. I think too many people have written books; I really do. They are endless, as we know.

Q: Your background in school was entirely in the humanities?

CHAMBERS: Yes; certainly English, literature, history. One of the questions I see here is, was there an influential teacher? Definitely. My first year at Miss Porter's, I started studying history of art. Miss McLennan was the toughest teacher I had. We were scared to death of her. We used to call her "the Sphinx." She absolutely started my interest in art. My mother had beautiful taste, but there were no sort of works of art in our house. Strangely enough, after I left Brussels, I was talking to Perry Stieglitz one day, and somehow he mentioned that my old long-ago teacher, Miss McLennan, moved to Washington and was a great friend of Perry and Mouné. I was just amazed, and he said, "Would you like to see her again?" I said, "I certainly would. I'd like to thank her for what she's meant to my life." So the next time I was in Washington, Perry arranged that we have dinner. She had been living with another retired teacher for years and years. We went to a Chinese restaurant and I said "I want to thank you for what you've given me."

Q: I bet she was thrilled.

CHAMBERS: She said, "You know, to hear that every now and then makes all the years of teaching worthwhile." She said she remembered my voice. I think the reason she had any memory was that she had gone to Denison University in Ohio and my father received an honorary degree [from there]. I really think it was because of him. She died last year at age eighty. But the interesting thing: I remembered her as being very tall and big. Well, she seemed to have shrunk. That evening I kept saying, "Miss McLennan," and she said, "Oh, Anne, please call me Sally." I said, "I just couldn't; I really couldn't," She was still "Miss McLennan."

Q: You were interested in history as well as art history?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes, English and history, very much so. Of course, Farmington in those days being a finishing school, we didn't have to take math. I have had arithmetic. That was always a blank spot.



Oh, several years before I went to Belgium, I had a call from a great friend of mine, who was also my lawyer and he said he and two other people wanted to come and see me. There was a big fund-raising going on for the school that my son was attending. One of the men was president of a bank, and I thought they wanted to come and talk about Jim's school, so I couldn't turn them down; they were all friends. I was just learning how to shoot, I came in with my gun over my shoulder. When I walked in my living room, there they were. My great friend said, "Oh, Anne, you can put that away. We're not here to ask you for money." I thought what on earth then? They were asking me to become a director of the bank. I was the first woman in Atlanta. And I said to the president, "Oh, Gordon, I really don't think I can do that. The only subject I ever failed in school was math." He said, "Don't worry about that; the computers do it all now."

Q: You didn't miss it?

CHAMBERS: I really can't say that I missed it.

Q: Did you enjoy any particular games with your little friends? Jacks, hop scotch?

CHAMBERS: Well, yes, jacks; I remember playing jacks in Miami, and marbles. Then I did become proficient later on-I remember having tennis lessons. My sister used to laugh and say I would get "my two big feet," set and if the ball happened to come, I would knock it back, but, otherwise, I didn't.

Q: That's the way to play tennis. Did you join the Girl Scouts or Campfire Girls?

CHAMBERS: I remember being a Scout, but again, we would leave Dayton and go to Florida, so I wouldn't say scouting had any impact.

Q: You went to a girl's school because it was your mother's school?

CHAMBERS: Yes. Well, in those days people used to joke and say the baby girls were registered the day they were born. Of course, that's totally changed.

Q: Did you ride?



CHAMBERS: Scared to death of horses. My mother tells the story that when I was really little, two or three, I fell off a pony, that I was very angry and I went and got the stirrup and tried to get back on. I don't know what caused that, but I was a very fearful child. I've always been frightened of heights. During the '20s, my father was combating Al Capone's influence at Miami Beach, and we'd have a watchman at the house. We didn't know this until much later. The Feds could never convict Capone because he never murdered anybody; he never did any of these things. Daddy tells the story that one day he was playing golf and there was machine gun fire; one gang against the other in sand traps. It was a terrible, terrible community, and no one knew how to get rid of this menace. They came and talked to Daddy, and he said, "Why don't you check on his income tax. Maybe you can get him on tax evasion."

Q: Your father was the one who suggested that?

CHAMBERS: Yes. Capone stood up in court when he was convicted and said "I know who did this to me; it's that goddamn Cox and I'm going to get him." We were never told this, but we were told later. I remember leaving Miami suddenly and we were in a stateroom and, Nanie, our nanny, wouldn't even let us go in the dining room, and we were told there were security people in the car. Now, whether we got those vibes-because even my sister, who really wasn't fearful, she and I were always frightened at night.

Q: That's a terrible thing.

CHAMBERS: We were never aware of any discussion, but do children get these vibes?

Q: I think so; don't you?

CHAMBERS: Well, I suppose so. Looking back, I probably overemphasize it, but I really don't look back on my childhood as being terribly happy. In fact, a friend of mine, a couple of years ago, sent me-we all get these pillows with sayings on them-saying, "Screw the golden years." And I wrote her back and said, "Thank you for thinking of me at Christmas, but I really can't agree with that because I'm finding my golden years my happiest ones."

Q: In those days, parents didn't sit down with children the way we do with ours. Children were "seen and not heard."

CHAMBERS: That's right. But my mother was certainly a loving person. And when my father died, Mother said, "One thing he never was able to express to you children was how he cared about you."



Q: So there was a coldness?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Unintentionally.

CHAMBERS: No cuddling at all. When my son was a little boy, I remember he was maybe four or five, and he came in the room and I said, "Come on, James, give me a big kiss." And my sister whose son is ten years older than mine said, "Now you've got to stop that." I said, "Why?" And she said, "He's not going to like that much longer. Jimmy absolutely made me stop kissing him." But my son never did. Not in front of his friends, but always very, very loving, and one of my happiest memories is, he had gone away to college and he told me he was driving home. He had called the night before to say where he was in Virginia and he was arriving on a Sunday and it was the Sunday before Christmas. I wanted to hear another clergyman who had a great impact on my life and was then our minister in Atlanta. I thought I could go to Tom's Christmas service and be back at home waiting for Jim before he got there, but Jim beat us and I saw his car. So I opened the door and I called to him, and I remember him coming down the stairs. He was then 18, I guess, and he absolutely enveloped me. He said, "I've been thinking of coming home for six weeks." I was in tears. He's a very warm, sensitive and demonstrative person. But, no, my parents were not.

Q: I'm glad you broke the cycle with your children.

CHAMBERS: More with my son than my daughters.

Q: Well, I think boys need it a great deal. Too much of this business of, "Oh, you're a man."CHAMBERS: Absolutely, "You mustn't cry."

Q: I find boys very vulnerable sometimes.

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes.

Q: When you went away to school, were you very lonely? Age twelve; that's pretty young.



CHAMBERS: I remember acutely suffering from homesickness. I went to camp, as I said, and I remember the pangs of homesickness, lying in the tent and hearing the bugles, and yet I really liked camp. My tent mate and I were good friends and I was a very good swimmer. I think that's because we grew up in Miami and we had our swimming teacher, who also trained Olympic stars. I remembered I won the Fourth of July races at the Polo Club. I would usually win the swimming cup, but I was no good at going through the barrels or jumping over them. My sister won all those. The last night at camp was awards night and my tent-mate won the best camper award. I was absolutely thrilled. I won the swimming cup, which was the biggest cup in camp. I was so proud. I had an upper berth coming back and I slept with the cup in my upper berth. The next summer, my sister was going to the same camp and she looked at the cup and said, "I'll win that and I'll also win the tennis cup and I'll also win the riding cup." Well, she came back cupless. When I asked about it, she said they gave the tennis cup to somebody whose family had given a lot of money.

Q: When you were at boarding school, did you have any other activities that you participated in? Stamp collecting or French Club or anything like that?

CHAMBERS: Again, we didn't have to do athletics. There was a list of major sports and walking was a major sport and that was my sport.

Q: Oh, how nice.

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes, it was. Of course, it's the most beautiful countryside and I remember this time of year, all of us in our polo coats, walking, and, of course, the leaves were so beautiful. No, I don't remember really belonging to anything.

Q: It was something you just wanted to get through and grow up?

CHAMBERS: I really don't remember thinking ahead.

Q: As you got a little older, your goal was: "I'll get married the way everybody else does"?

CHAMBERS: I remember going to a wedding with my father when I was fourteen, and there was the grande dame of Dayton. She turned to my father and said, "Well, Jim, one of these days someone is going to come along and say: I want to marry your daughter." And I thought, "Good heavens." I couldn't imagine such a thing.



Q: How long was it before you were married?

CHAMBERS: I was twenty.

Q: You were just twenty. Were you formally presented? You had a debut?

CHAMBERS: No, I didn't, because we lived in Dayton, Ohio. The year before there had been two debutantes, but my year I would have been the only one. One of my roommates in boarding school made her debut in New York, and she suggested that I might want to do that. Well, I think I was too shy, and I felt it really wasn't appropriate. I didn't live in New York.

Q: Tell me about Finch? Was that immediately after you finished at Miss Porter's?

CHAMBERS: No, the winter after I finished at Miss Porter's, I went with two other girls to spend some months living with a family in Paris. That was very much a thing to do, particularly, [for] girls who had gone to schools which were not college preparatory. It was a custom in those days, and it was wonderful. That was the beginning of my love for France.

Q: At a very impressionable age, of course.

CHAMBERS: Yes. We lived with a family-you know, it was a very aristocratic family-who had fallen on hard times, and we grew to love them.

Q: You were all in the same -

CHAMBERS: House. We spoke only French at meals and we had a tutor. We'd have French lessons and then we go around to the Louvre, the museums, all around the country. We'd go to Chartres and study. All of this in French. It was a wonderful experience.

Q: It was certainly wonderful preparation, too. This would have been in the late 1930's, is that right?

CHAMBERS: That would have been '37, '38, I guess, yes.

Q: At that time, did you get any feeling that the war was coming? As a young girl?



CHAMBERS: I don't think then. I think that next year, and again, I forget - a friend from school was going to a school in Italy, in Florence, and I had decided to go. Then for a couple of years before the war actually started, there were war scares and Mussolini was rattling sabers, and so my father cancelled me out. I really was sorry because my friends went on and had a wonderful time and I think I would have loved that. I guess that is when I went to Finch instead.

Q: Is that the Finch in New York?

CHAMBERS: Yes, but it's no longer there. When I went to it, it was a junior college. When my older daughter went it was a four-year college, and she graduated. But as with many small colleges, there was no endowment. They just couldn't make it.

Q: And, again, you studied liberal arts, especially art and history.

CHAMBERS: I really wasn't very serious as far as studying, and my friends were making their debuts. I wasn't a serious college student, so I decided not to go back to Finch. The following year, that would have been 1939, I went to something called the Residence School run by an Irish lady named Mollie Hourigan and we lived in a brownstone. The only class that we actually did there was learning about operas and maybe piano, and then we all went out to other schools. I went to a cooking school, and then I guess we had French with Miss Hourigan. I really liked that. I went there in the fall and the early part of December my father bought the evening newspaper in Atlanta; the Atlanta Journal. It just so happened that the whole deal jelled just at the time of the world premiere of *Gone With the Wind*. So Mother and Daddy went down for that, and Mother called me at school and said, "Get on the train and come on. This is going to be the greatest spectacle that has ever been." I said, "Oh, Christmas vacation doesn't start until next week." She said, "I don't care; whatever you're learning there, this is much more exciting." So I did go down on the train and when I got there our hostess, with whom we were staying, said, "A friend of mine, Katharine Johnson, is having a luncheon for your parents." Katharine Johnson became my mother-in-law six months later. I met my first husband there at the luncheon, so it was a very quick courtship. He was studying in New Haven at the [Yale] graduate school. I went back to the school after New Year's but then we were engaged by February, so I just gave up the school and came home and that was the end of my education.

Q: Were you married that spring?

CHAMBERS: Yes, in June. I've lived in Atlanta ever since.

Q: I see. You didn't live in Atlanta until you were a married woman?



CHAMBERS: No; that's right.

Q: What did you do as a married woman? Did you do the usual homemaking?

CHAMBERS: I did the provisional course of the Junior League, and my mother-in-law got me in her garden club. That was supposed to be something very big.

You asked if I had any feeling about the war. Looking back to the year when I was fourteen, when I was in school in Washington, at Holton Arms, I remember telling my roommate about current events and things that I had read: Hitler, Mussolini. She was smart; she wasn't a dumb-bell at all, and she said, "I just can't believe you know all these things." I said, "There are frightening things happening."

Q: Your father would have been very aware of these things.

CHAMBERS: Yes; that's right. Well, let's see; we were married in June and the next December was Pearl Harbor. Even before that, I guess, I volunteered at the British War Relief. So I did start that. That had been established even before Pearl Harbor. Then we went in the Navy soon after that.

Q: Were you able to follow your husband around?

CHAMBERS: I moved up here and lived at the River House, so we were here for several months before my husband went overseas and I went back home with my parents. My sister was married the following June. She came back home and her husband was killed a few months later. That was terrible. Just after the war started, I had my first child.

Q: And that was your daughter?

CHAMBERS: Yes. To go back to the garden club, I said later, laughingly, the only thing I've ever done that made my father really proud was when I was elected president of the Peach Tree Garden Club. I told Daddy, and he was going to have lunch with Mr. Woodruff, who was "Mr. Coca Cola" in Atlanta. And he said, "I told Bob Woodruff you're the only Yankee, ever, to become president of the club." That really pleased him very much.



Then I remember someone I met at the beginning of my stay in Atlanta. He was quite pompous, but I remember he said to me, "You're never going to make it in Atlanta." And I said, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Why?" He said, "You're not pushy enough. You have to be really pushy." So this same man, not too many years ago, was complimenting me on what I had done, and I couldn't resist because I have never forgotten that. I was so shy, having a rough time there anyway. I said, "Oh, I guess this means you've changed your opinion?" And I reminded him of that. He just bristled. He said, "I never said that." I said, "Jack, that's the sort of thing one doesn't forget." Anyway, that was how I started out in Atlanta.

Q: And the war came; the war went. When did you get interested in the various businesses? Or did that not happen until after your father died?

CHAMBERS: I think I mentioned we were the second family, and apparently in his first marriage, his wife had told something about the business, something that shouldn't have been said, and he felt very strongly that women should not be involved in any way in the business.

Q: So even had you wanted to, you couldn't have?

CHAMBERS: Oh no, not at all. I do remember, though, right after the war; I don't know what sort of rearrangement he was doing, but he did put me on the board of directors. That didn't mean that I had anything to say, but it was some sort of acknowledgment.

Q: So your life was actually centered in Atlanta and the group of friends you made. And you were the typical, conventional woman who knew her place, as we all did, didn't we?

CHAMBERS: Yes, and I did. I was active in the junior league, and when I think back I think that was another person; it couldn't have been me. As I said I became president of the garden club. So it was a very typical life. By that time, I had two daughters.

Q: Did you feel complete? Were you enjoying your life, or did you feel there was something you wanted to do?

CHAMBERS: No; I didn't. My marriage was not very happy. Their father really never paid any attention to the children, so we didn't do things as a family. Even without a good marriage, I thought a woman's happiest years were being with her young children. No, I never thought of going beyond.



Q: So you're what is known as a late bloomer?

CHAMBERS: Oh, very, yes.

Q: Do you think the fact that you have done so much since has anything to do with the women's movement and the so-called liberation of women?

CHAMBERS: I've been interested in it; certainly. I worked very hard for the passage of the ERA in Georgia, and it was just hopeless. Those rural legislators said that if they went home, having voted for it, they would never be reelected.

Q: And it's the women who wouldn't let them.

CHAMBERS: I know.

Q: That's what's so strange.

CHAMBERS: I think mainly I became liberated and less inhibited. I just became a different person.

Q: Do you think that would have happened in any case?

CHAMBERS: During the years that I was being the typical young matron, I did start playing golf and I really loved that. I was never a good athlete. I had to really work very hard, but I really, really did, and that was one of my great pleasures. I played a lot. We went to northern Michigan in the summers and I played there. Then our company bought a plantation in South Carolina for the pulp wood-we have a newsprint plant-so we started going there. By this time, I was married for the second time and my husband loved to shoot and there was wonderful quail shooting. I realized that all the women shot.



One Christmas I looked under the Christmas tree and I saw a long, narrow box, and I knew what was in it and I didn't want to open it; I waited until the end. It was some new kind of gun that didn't kick, and my husband said, "It's the only one in Atlanta." He was very proud of it and I said, "Oh, what a shame to waste it on me." Then my nephew moved to Atlanta and we were very simpatico. He stayed with us for a while. He rented a house in the country because he had three dogs and he came in very excited-I had the gun by this time-and said, "My landlord, Mr. Palmer, gives shooting lessons. Now's your chance, Aunt Anne." So I started shooting. I was fifty years old and I asked him if I was his oldest beginning pupil. He said, no, he had a woman in Texas who started when she was fifty-five. I said I really had never held a gun. He said, "Good. In the first place women are easier to teach, and I'd rather have someone who hasn't learned a lot of mistakes." He said, "Men, even if they're beginners, think they know a lot more about it." That became a wonderful association. The Palmers actually lived in Greensboro, but they had a country place here and by that time I had gotten fed up with golf. I frankly was sick of women's foursomes. By the time the shooting came along, I really had had enough of golf. Well, I got really into the shooting and I really got good. I had the most wonderful teacher and it was such fun, so I said there's not enough time to play golf and shooting. I like the shooting better. I feel a lot better at it, plus we were going to our place in South Carolina. It became a great part of my life. It was less trivial than it sounds. I really did become a good shot, and I was terribly proud of myself.

Q: Yes, if you turn out to be very good in one thing, it spills over in your feelings about everything.

CHAMBERS: Fred Palmer was my teacher. He and his wife and one or two other couples would come often to South Carolina. Then we started going to Scotland, grouse shooting. Well, as we all know, our friends differ as we change interest. We see the people, obviously, the people in our group. Fred died, and afterward I said to someone who had known him and loved him as I did, "You know, he gave me almost the first self-confidence I ever had and it wasn't just in teaching me to shoot." And Sandy said-this was a very wise man-he said, "I'm so glad you realize that because I saw that a long time ago."

Fred had the most marvelous sense of humor. One other friend of mine, Philip Alston and I were the only people any of our friends knew who had supported Jimmy Carter through the years. And Fred said, when I told him I was going to become an ambassador, "Do you realize that all of your friends thought you and Philip were crazy?" I said, "Sure, but this has been my political history all through my life." And he laughed about it. Anyway, my father and Fred Palmer, I feel, were great influences, and the third person was Jimmy Carter, because by appointing me to that job, my life became really changed. And I was surprised, honestly. I naively thought when I finished my time in Belgium that I would go back to Atlanta and my life would take up in the same way. It hasn't at all. I give great, great credit to the fact that I became more exposed, for one thing.



The summer after I went home I was asked to become the first woman director of the Coca Cola Company. I don't think that ever would have happened if I had stayed in Atlanta. There have been so many things like that. That's why I have an apartment in New York now. I never, never would have dreamed of such a thing if I had just stayed on in Atlanta.

Q: Tell me about how you got to know the Carters?

CHAMBERS: Well, since I first could vote, well, every presidential election, I would go down and volunteer and do whatever. I was keenly interested in every Democratic election, and in 1966 many of us were very concerned about the possibility of Lester Maddox becoming Governor of Georgia. Most of my friends in Atlanta are Republicans, but they always have been everywhere. Someone said to me, "Did it ever occur to you, you might be wrong?" I said, "Heavens, no." And someone asked my father once if he'd ever consider voting for a Republican and he said, "Certainly, if I ever found one worth voting for." So I said to my friend Philip Alston, "Is there anyone on the scene rising in this State to combat this terrible tragedy?" And he said, "There is a young man in the State legislature, a State senator. I'd like you to meet him. His name is Jimmy Carter. I think you'll be impressed with him." I think I met him at Griffin Bell's house. And I was impressed. So right then I started working. That year he was defeated by Lester Maddox. I remember after the election, Charlie Kirbo said, "If we had had \$20,000 we would have won." I didn't have the kind of income then that I do now, but still I said, "Charlie, why didn't you call me? Don't ever let that happen again."

After his father's defeat in 1980, I was at a luncheon with Chip Carter. It was kind of the first old group. Chip said, "I'll never forget the time that Daddy came home with a check from Anne Chambers. It was the biggest check anybody had ever seen." Well, that's how it started. He was defeated then, and we had Lester Maddox. But then we all started working again, and he was, as you know, elected governor.

My house is right across from the [governor's] mansion. When they moved in, he said, "There were funds either for a tennis court or a swimming pool." And they couldn't decide, because the family liked both things, and I said, "Why don't you build a tennis court, because I have a pool." And that's what happened. So my family, who played tennis went over there and, oh, it was quite an unusual scene: the policemen were stopping traffic and the governor would come across with Amy on his shoulders in their bathing suits. When they came, I rarely went down; I just left them by themselves. In an interview after they had left the governor's mansion, Rosalynn said that she felt like such a country bumpkin and she felt she didn't know how to dress, and I felt so sad. I thought if she'd ever told me that I would have gone-they're both very reserved. We didn't just bounce back and forth. They're very hard-working. Anyway, it was a nice arrangement.



After they moved out and a new governor had moved in, one day my brother-in-law and nephew came bounding down the stairs with their tennis rackets, and I said, "Where are you going?" My brother-in-law said, "We're going across." I said, "The guard has changed. We no longer have an invitation. You've got to find another tennis court." People always speak of that and my relationship and the fact of the Governor bringing Amy on his shoulders.

Q: Even though you didn't see much of them, you were friends?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes; definitely. I remember-Amy, you see, was about four-and one Halloween Rosalynn called and said, obviously she was too young to go trick or treating, but she had a witch's costume, and what time was I going to be home? They thought if she did one or two houses that would-so we made a big fuss of having them come over. The photographer came and took her picture. But that's how I started with Jimmy Carter.

Q: Did you ever actually campaign for him?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes.

Q: You did do all of that?

CHAMBERS: Oh, my, yes. I remember in the '76 campaign, I was married, and my husband and I were up in New York with another couple and it was toward the end of the campaign. I didn't really make speeches. I worked very hard while I was raising money, and I made two very good friends. I had known Betty Talmadge very casually, but we worked together, and Robin Duke, who lives here in New York and whose husband has been ambassador. We talked every night on the phone and I said, "This creates a bond that really lasts forever." To me there was nothing more exciting than being that involved in a political campaign-the adrenalin!

My father died when Jim was three months old, but he has great pride in his grandfather. In fact, when he was home last weekend, he was up in the attic looking for things. Someone had sent me for a present the framed front page of the New York Times saying, "Cox Nominated" and a picture of me. I'm sending some things up to Jim and he asked me to send that. People often ask me and ask him if he ever might go into politics. I think he might. Someone said, "Oh, wouldn't that be terrible." I said, "No; we need young people." He's intensely interested. The first year that he could vote he was a freshman in college. He decided he wanted to come home to vote, not by absentee ballot. If you remember, the weekend before Tuesday it was really touch and go, and he called me up Sunday and said, "What are the plans on Tuesday? I said, "We planned a big victory celebration, but I can't guarantee; I don't know what to tell you." He said, "I don't care, either way I want to be in Atlanta on Tuesday night."



Q: To be part of it; a part of the history. It must be a very exciting thing.

CHAMBERS: So he came down, got there in time to vote and then had to take the early bird back. We had the original little group of Carter supporters; I think it was seven couples. The big campaign party for the evening was at the Omni, which is next to the Omni Hotel, so we decided to get a little private room and have television and just have buffet and drinks. I organized it. My nephew called to ask if I wanted to come down to the newspaper that evening. I said, "Oh, no, I've got a room; it's the original Carter supporters." And Jimmy laughed and said, "Well, it doesn't have to be a very big room." Which was true.

Q: Did the seven couples include the Carters?

CHAMBERS: They came in, but they didn't stay during the counting. Anyway, Jim wasn't ready, so he said he'd come down later. The Secret Service arrived before the Carters did, and they asked me could I vouch for everyone in this room. I said, "Yes, I can." I added, "There may be a young kid, with kind of long hair coming to the door in a little while, saying he's my son, and I am expecting him." A little while later they came and said, "Sorry to bother you again." They opened the door and here's Jim with his long hair. "Tell them it's me. Tell them it's me. They won't let me in. Nobody will let me in. Bobby Lipschitz too, and his father's inside. Tell them to let him in."

Bert Lance brought Jimmy Roosevelt that night. The summer before at the Democratic convention my husband had seen in a funny little old shop, a Cox/Roosevelt button, so Jim that night had Carter/Mondale on one side and Cox/Roosevelt on the other. Jimmy Roosevelt came up and said, "Hey, kid, how do you happen to have that button with my father's name on it?" And Jim said, "Because my grandfather's name is on top of your father's name." Bert Lance heard this and said, "Oh, I've got to get a picture of this," so he brought the photographer over and took a picture of the two Jimmys, Roosevelt and Chambers. So that was rather amusing.

Q: When Carter won, were you surprised that he made it nationally?



CHAMBERS: Well, again, the story that I tell, the summer before they were leaving the Governor's mansion, Rosalynn called one Saturday afternoon and asked if I was going to be home for a while. I said, "Sure," and she said, "Jimmy has something he wants to tell you." So I was curious. I remember it was hot and I had one of those ceiling fans on the porch, and we sat down. He doesn't do small talk, you know; he came right to the point and said, "I just came to tell you I'm going to run for president." I really gulped and said, "Well, good luck." He said, "When I told my mother that, she said, 'President of what?'" That's one of my favorite stories. And I did think, "What is he thinking of?"

Q: "Jimmy who?"

CHAMBERS: Yes. I realized he was dead serious. As I say, I was very involved in the campaign and worked very hard. The thing about the Playboy article came out and, oh, there were a lot of difficult times. You asked if I campaigned, and I said my husband and I were here with another couple, and Bert Lance called me and said there was going to be a rally in Wall Street. It was the building where George Washington had spoken, and he said they were having Democratic celebrities, Bella Abzug and Lauren Bacall and Robin Duke, who speaks beautifully. He said, "They want someone who is from Georgia who knows the Carters as a friend and neighbor, and will you do it?"

I was paralyzed. Absolutely. Oh, I thought, "If this means so much-I remember, I had some months before started doing transcendental meditation. So the morning of this rally I was just in a twit. The phone rang and it was the young couple who had been my teachers in TM, and I said, "Oh, I can't talk to you now. I'm in such a twit. I've got to make a speech in Wall Street, I've never done anything like this in my life. I'm just too nervous to talk." She said, "How long is the drive down to Wall Street?" very calmly. I said, "I don't know; I guess twenty minutes." She said, "When you get in the car, just close your eyes and meditate, and that will calm you down." And it really did. So I did do that. I was rather excited about it. That was the first speaking like that that I've ever done.

Q: And what point in the campaign was this?

CHAMBERS: This was late. This was like a couple of weeks before election. It was when it was getting really crucial.

Q: You were really thrown into the limelight with a vengeance.

CHAMBERS: Yes.



Q: But afterward, it must have been a wonderful feeling?(Part of anecdote lost. Mrs. Chambers is discussing election evening, 1976.)

CHAMBERS: I said to Lillian Carter, Jimmy's mother, "You better get to bed." She said, "There's no way I could go to bed; I'm too excited. Just come and let's chat."

Q: Miss Lillian was at the hotel?

CHAMBERS: Yes. She said, "I'll see you tomorrow." I said, "I think I'm going to take a hanky along with me, it may be too big for me." She said, "I think I'm going to take a big one." I remember her saying that. When they moved in the Governor's mansion, she came up and was a great help with Amy.

Q: I imagine she would be.

CHAMBERS: Because she knew Rosalynn was a very active wife, and I think they felt that Amy just kind of needed somebody in the house. I remember her being there a great deal.

Q: And did you sit in the special box all through the inauguration?

CHAMBERS: Yes, and how exciting it was!

Q: Where were you during the famous walk down Pennsylvania Avenue?

CHAMBERS: Just walking, and that was wonderful.

Q: And you went to all the parties and everything?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes. That was January. It was early spring, I guess, maybe March, early April, and Bert Lance called the man who was then the president of the Atlanta Newspapers and told him that I was going to be asked to go to Belgium, and to tell me that I would get a call in the next day. So I was prepared when Cy Vance called. He said, "If you don't mind, just keep it under your hat, because we want to make the announcement." And I said, "Is it all right if I tell my children?" and he said yes.



So I told my daughters. In those days I stayed at the River Club when I came here. They had cute operators and I know they listened to everything; they were so curious. I was trying to be subtle with Jim. He was in college, as I said. I said, "Jim, I am going to be appointed to a country." He said, "That's wonderful, which one?" I said, "All right, think of your geography; it's between France and Germany." "Oh, it's Luxembourg, naturally, all the women. . ." I said, "No, Jim, it's not." "It's Holland?" "No." I said, "Jim, you're being awfully dense. Do you remember when we went on our first barge trip, the country? You're really being dumb." Then I started quoting that famous poem, "Flanders Field" Well, of course, he was far too young to-Finally I said, "Just go and look at a map.

Q: Well, how did your children feel about your becoming an ambassador?

CHAMBERS: Oh, they were terribly excited.

Q: And they approved? It's quite an honor. Did you ever discuss with Jimmy Carter why he chose you for Belgium particularly?

CHAMBERS: No.

Q: I just wondered what comes into the decisions on these things.

CHAMBERS: Philip Alston, who had been my friend, was named Ambassador to Australia and both he and his wife speak with a southern accent. We have a friend who has very dry wit and someone asked, "How were they chosen?" He said, "Well, I think Anne was chosen for Belgium because she speaks French, and the Alstons for Australia because Elkin almost speaks English.

Q: It's a good quote. It's a funny story.

CHAMBERS: You're asking did I ever discuss why he chose me. Heavens, no. It was all very correct.

Q: I was sure of that, but I just wondered if after the fact . . .



CHAMBERS: No. Then I started really commuting to Washington and learning for about a month. This was very touching: every friend who I invited to my swearing-in, came. Everyone, except my sister and my brother-in-law. I have two friends who are almost reclusive, and I said, "Oh, the Meads will never come." They did. I have another friend whose husband was terminally ill with cancer. They came, but didn't stay for the dinner party. My three children had the party. They were the hosts.

Q: Tell me about your swearing-in? Was that up on the eighth floor of the Department?

CHAMBERS: Yes; it was in the room with the Thomas Jefferson desk. And that was very nice.

Q: And who swore you in?

CHAMBERS: Warren Christopher. He's a wonderful man. And he had done research about my father, in his remarks. I was very impressed.

Q: Who held the Bible?

CHAMBERS: My son.

Q: Must have been a proud moment for the whole family?

CHAMBERS: My younger daughter is very good on her feet [and she spoke]. My older daughter said, "I will die if I have to get up." Well, Jim got up, and said, "I guess after my Mom has coped with all of us, for well at least twenty years as far as I am concerned, I think she can handle all the problems; I think she can handle whatever." I said, "Jim, you've never acknowledged the fact that there were any problems in the last twenty years."

Q: Did you have any copy of your remarks that you could give me? Did you write them down?

CHAMBERS: I have them written. Let me write that down, also that letter with a picture from my granddaughter. She calls me, "Honey." She said: "Dear Honey, you better be smart; you better be wise; if you're a fake, go jump in the lake." In my remarks I read this, and I said, "I hope there are no lakes in Belgium."



Q: Your eight or nine-year-old granddaughter; isn't that nice? Now tell me about the training that the State Department gave you? They had the ambassador's course at that time; did they not?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Did you feel that was worthwhile?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes.

Q: It was? Answered a lot of questions?

CHAMBERS: Yes; very much so. I had not been a student in so many years, and I stayed at the Madison and I worked all day. They'd say, "We'll send you back in a car." It was April; it was such a beautiful time of the year. I said, "Not only is it such a beautiful walk, I really just have to get the cobwebs out of my brain."

Q: Can you recall your briefings and what was discussed?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes. I remember my first appointment was with Jim Lowenstein [Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs], and he was in northern Europe. And I, of course, was so excited and such an amateur and so naive. He was kind of dour. I said, "It's just so wonderful to be going to such a country." He said, "Well, yes, Belgium is a nice country; just one thing the matter with it." I said, "What's that?" "The weather." And I said, "Oh, you mean like London?" "Worse." So I made up my mind then I wasn't going to let the weather disturb me. The amusing thing about that was, he was appointed Ambassador to Luxembourg, and even he admitted it rains more in Luxembourg than in Brussels.

Q: Is that so?

CHAMBERS: Really. I never drove over there when it wasn't absolutely teeming with rain. That is statistically, so I've teased him ever since about that, his warning me about the weather. I said it served him right.

Next was, well, history of the country, past and present. I remember, finally, about six o'clock, there was still one big book, and I said, "I'll take this back to the hotel and I'll go to bed early and I'll read it there." He said, "Oh, no; it's classified." So I had to sit there and read it. Some of what is considered classified: the King's name, the King's age-it was no more classified. . . You know.



Q: Exactly, I know. They do it with a heavy hand.

CHAMBERS: Yes. I even went out to Virginia to the office responsible for decorating embassy residences. I went to the Pentagon. I met with Stansfield Turner [at CIA]. There were seven newly appointed ambassadors. We had a two-day seminar on terrorism. The first day the spouses were included; the second day they were not.

The first thing we were told was that our government never pays ransom. So I think it was like saying, "Anybody who wants to leave, can leave now." I remember Senator Mansfield, me, Philip Alston, Kingman Brewster, and a wonderful man named Sam Lewis who went on to Israel and just left last year. I always forget one. Well, there were seven. Oh, Goheen; he was going to India. And I remember Senator Mansfield saying, "If someone is really out to get you; they're going to." I mean, surely take precautions. I just felt I wasn't going to live in fear. I'm very glad I was there the years I was rather than now, because I guess ambassadors and spouses really do have security problems.

The British residence in Brussels is three doors from ours and we're right across from the Parc Royale, which was lovely. I walked my little dog, the predecessor of Emily, every day. We'd go after breakfast. The British Ambassador, Peter Wakefield, would say, "You shouldn't be walking out there by yourself." But he had the IRA to contend with. His colleague in The Hague had been shot and killed just after he arrived. I really never felt any fear.

Q: Prior to this time, you grew up in a very well-to-do and influential family. Have you ever had any threats of kidnaping?

CHAMBERS: In the Al Capone days.

Q: I remember you telling me about that.

CHAMBERS: One thing, though it was not a threat-I think it was in the '60's; I think when Jim was in high school-the editor of our morning paper, Reg Murphy, was kidnaped and they knew somehow that he had been taken across the State line, so the FBI came into it. My nephew, my sister's son, is ten years older than my son, and the FBI man said, "Frankly, I'm very surprised that the target was neither you nor your cousin." Fortunately, my son was on an interim trip with other students from school.

Q: So you had to get used to living -



CHAMBERS: I'm sure now, if I were there, I'd have to be more careful. I guess I would be. I just didn't feel threatened.

Q: It hadn't escalated to the point -

CHAMBERS: No, not in that country. The British ambassador, certainly, and then just after I left, the Turkish Embassy was bombed. Those were for particularly reasons. I mean, no one was mad at us then.

Q: Did your husband go to any of these briefings?

CHAMBERS: No, just the one on terrorism. He was the one who was frightened all the time. He always thought he was going to be kidnaped; not me.

Q: And held for ransom.

CHAMBERS: The hostages were taken in Iran while I was in Belgium. What it did for the morale was just awful.

Q: You mean your staff?

CHAMBERS: Yes. They knew some of the marines. Then they would start, particularly the younger ones and my secretary, would start getting letters: "Get out of the Foreign Service; we're worried about you. Think of the children." It was awful for their morale, the fact that this could happen. It was very shocking.

Q: It shocked people. It brought the Foreign Service to the public attention. Before, people thought: "Foreign Service-that must be something like the Foreign Legion."

CHAMBERS: So many of them said they'd go home, particularly, I guess, if they came from small towns, and they'd say, "They think it's a perpetual cocktail party. We're just living off the government and going to wonderful places." Lord, some of the places are awful.

Q: And you know how hard you work.



CHAMBERS: That's right. So the last bit of the preparation was this terrorism.

Q: That came after your Senate hearings?

CHAMBERS: No. It was surprising, and it was something interesting: three of us, "A", "B", and "C"; It was Alston, Brewster and Chambers at the Senate hearings together. We had tried, I with my lawyer, tried to think of every possible question, and the area we felt there could be questions about was what our family businesses had become. I really boned up on facts and figures, and I'm not good at figures. My head was so stuffed I kept thinking it was like an abacus or something. We've got fifty newspapers and twelve stations, you know. They did the two gentlemen, Alston, then Brewster.

The presiding Senator was a charming, elderly man from Alabama. The name is McReynolds. He was a courtly southern gentleman and he was really being courtly to a lady. There were some routine questions, very routine, and there were maybe- oh, Claiborne Pell was one I remember.

I'll go back a little bit and explain: there had been quite a furor when Bert Lance and Griffin Bell were appointed because of the fact that they belonged to the Piedmont Driving Club in Atlanta, which is a discriminatory social club; neither blacks or Jewish people belong. They had had to resign. So I thought if I were asked that, this was going to be fun. I could say, "Goodness, no, I'm not a member of the Driving Club. I'm one of the groups who are discriminated against. There are no women members."

Senator Javits started rattling papers and said, "Let's see, now; let's see. I see that you belong to an organization in Atlanta that discriminates." And I thought, "Oh, boy, Piedmont Driving Club. This is going to be fun." I said, "Oh, really, what organization is this?" He said, "The Atlanta Junior League." I haven't followed the Junior League in so many years; I was so disappointed. I had long since been inactive. I think the only reason I still pay dues is because they send out a yearbook including every address and phone number, and it's easier than looking up a number. I said I had not been an active member for a number of years and I don't know if it's discriminatory. He said, "Will you look into the matter and if you find that it is, are you prepared to take the proper action?" Well, The Junior League means nothing to me, so I said, "Absolutely."

Afterwards, I said, "Why in the world would he mention the Junior League?" They said, "Don't you realize he wasn't speaking to you; he was speaking to his constituents." I then immediately went to the phone and found that on our TV station our best anchor, Monica Kaufman, who is black, is a member of the Atlanta Junior League. So it no longer is.



A friend of mine, who was divorced, and was planning to go with me as my staff aide, had been going to Washington to be trained at the State Department. She has always cared a great deal about the Atlanta Junior League and she said, "You're not going to resign?" I said, "If it means whether I go to Belgium, I would." She said, "Oh, that would be a terrible thing. They'd be awfully upset." The President of the League called me. I mean, talk about a tempest in a teapot; I thought that was stupid, ridiculous. And then, all the business details I had tried to stuff into my head.

Q: I understand that the AFSA, the American Foreign Service Association, raised some sort of objection.

CHAMBERS: Oh, that objection was very upsetting. This was while I was doing my preparation and I was told there was a most wonderful man, Ed Djerejian. He was just made Deputy Assistant Secretary. Well, if it hadn't been for him, I don't think I would have gone through with it. He was in the northern European area. He's the one who took me around. He was just wonderful and very simpatico. He told me this Association was going to object to Phil Alston and me and say we were not qualified. This was just after Ted Sorensen had been turned down, and this upset me very much. I went home for the weekend, and I returned Monday and I said, "Ed, I'm not going to be another Ted Sorensen. I'm going to withdraw my name if I'm not qualified." He said, "It has nothing to do with you personally. It is against any political appointees; career people feel threatened." He said, "Don't be bothered by it." Well, I was, and several times I know I became discouraged. Someone said to me, "Why in the world would you want to take on a job like that, just to do pure drudgery?". This was after the Foreign Service Association controversy, and I had felt some sort of hostility from some of the regular Foreign Service people. This person breezed in and said, "I just want to tell you something that I don't think you hear much. I think it's wonderful to have, sometimes, political appointees who are close to the President. You could get information across that we cannot."

And I must say that I, again, felt antagonism during the first few months at the embassy. Once there was something that was crucial to us. No one could get through to the State Department, so I called Jody Powell, and he was wonderful; no matter where he was, he called me back. This time he called me back from Air Force One. The whole staff was impressed with that.

Q: When you started out for Belgium, what were your goals as the President's personal envoy? What did you hope to achieve?



CHAMBERS: Well, I guess, I hoped to continue or even strengthen the good relations between the two countries. Maybe, to in some way improve relations. I had met the Saudi Ambassador and he called me one day and said that he and the Lebanese and the Iranian Ambassador had leased a shoot together, and invited me to come on a Tuesday, anyway mid-week, and I was very self-righteous and said "Oh, Ambassador, thank you so much, but I only shoot on weekends." He said, "Madam, when three ambassadors invite you to shoot, you do not refuse." I said, "Good, I'll tell my staff that I was invited."

Tim Towell, who was my First Secretary and who was such a help to me, was the one person who was really honest, and he said, "You could often do more good, get more information, walking down a country road with your gun over your shoulder, and the Saudi's gun over his shoulder, than at the most formal National Day celebration." [Note-Tim Towell became US Ambassador to Paraguay in September 1988].

Q: That's right. That's why, when you said you had taken up shooting, I thought immediately-

CHAMBERS: Well, it also, as far as PR, was good. because that news preceded me everywhere I went. I had invitations for everywhere. Oh, it was wonderful, and of course, I loved it.

Q: Were you given any specifics you were supposed to pursue there, such as the sale of F-16's to Belgium?

CHAMBERS: No. Ambassador Firestone had had the F-16 to do, and successfully completed that and that was wonderful. No; not until, as they say, the "miss-eyle" [missile] crisis came along. Then we, along with the NATO ambassador, were busy with it the last year, year and a half, but that was most discouraging because, first of all, the Belgium Government takes so long to make up their mind. They were very influenced by the Dutch on it. When the Dutch Parliament turned down the missiles, then there would be a backslide, and I'd go over to a minister, and say, "The State Department would like an answer." "Oh, everybody's on holiday. No one's here." That's probably the most frustrating thing.

Q: America deals differently with things?



CHAMBERS: Oh, entirely. This is not my career in Belgium, but it points up the fact: when I bought my house in France, it was the last summer. I knew I was going home, and I just felt I couldn't leave Europe, so I decided which place to look. I went during a Labor Day weekend because that gave me an extra day. I bought my property, and somebody told me later on, that when the real estate man said the property had been sold, they said, "It must have been an American." He said "Why do you say that?" They said, "Only an American would do it so quickly." I said, "I only had that one weekend, I had to go back to work." But that is true.

Just a couple of months ago there were some legal documents about my property in France that had to be signed by me and my son. A notaire would be coming to get my signature, so my lawyer said, "Bring the document for Mrs. Chamber's son and she will get it back to him." Well, he came without it. "Oh, there wasn't enough time for the secretary to type it." It was three pages long. I said, "I really feel strongly that I want this signed right away." He said, "I promise it'll go out either tomorrow or Monday." I came back to France a month later and there it was, still not typed. So I called Chip, my lawyer. He said, "Isn't this just incredible? Their lack of urgency, and the red tape and bureaucracy!"

Q: You had the residence, fixed up before you got there, did you?

CHAMBERS: I did. My surroundings are important to me, and, particularly with what I'd heard about the weather. My friend Robin Duke, who had been an Ambassadress three times, said, "Take some of your own possessions. That really makes you feel good. Take some of your favorite plates. You get awfully tired of looking at the eagle on the official plates." One of my daughters was going to be in London, and, of course, I couldn't go ahead of time, so I asked her to go and take a look. She wired me and said all the walls are gray, and when it's raining when you get there, you're going to take one look, burst into tears and come home. I asked the decorator (Stuart Gree) who was helping me at that point (the Firestones had been gone quite a few months), and he really did it all over. I paid for all of that myself.

Q: What would a typical day be?

CHAMBERS: There wasn't a typical day, particularly in a small country, because sometimes I'd go to Antwerp. That was one of the wonderful parts of the job.

Q: You traveled a great deal?



CHAMBERS: As someone said, you can go to any part of the country and be back in two hours. There were many things going on in Antwerp and Ghent. There were 1200 American firms, so I visited places like that. I went to a newspaper plant. I loved those things and I'd see other parts of the country.

Q: What about your relations with the Belgian press? Did they use to report on your activities as the American reporters do?

CHAMBERS: They printed some things, but not a great deal.

Q: I have been told, though I have not myself read it, that there was a very scurrilous article about you in Newsweek in 1979. Do you remember that?

CHAMBERS: There was one.

Q: What was that all about, and why was that done?

CHAMBERS: I'd forgotten about that. I remember just before I was leaving Washington, there was one in the Post. I guess it talked about the family. One of those terrible-I don't remember.

Q: What is your overall impression of people in the American Foreign Service?

CHAMBERS: Oh, marvelous. Everyone I've seen, my ambassador friends; I talked to Philip Alston about this. I have never met in any profession a more dedicated group. I mean, obviously, it's not for the money. Really dedicated, hard working, people. As I say, at first I felt some antagonism, but I truly think by the time, maybe a year, in almost every case I felt that I had established a rapport. Francis De Tarr, who was the Political Counselor, I always felt was sort of for the have-nots, against anyone who was a political appointee. By the time he left to go to Paris, maybe he respected me, and we ended up really good friends, I felt. We all were working together; I think that's it.

Q: Did you ever go to the White House? You did tell me that?

CHAMBERS: I worked with the prime minister on his first call in this country, and that was exciting. Mrs. Tindemans had never been to Washington. I was very proud because it was the middle of October, and it was so beautiful.



Q: Isn't it gorgeous in the fall?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes. And then when the King and Queen came, I, of course, went with them.

Q: I went to a reception at the Corcoran Art Gallery for Queen Fabiola.

CHAMBERS: That's right, that's right. But then the Carters said-and again, this was something that illustrates a point: first there was going to be a luncheon at the White House. Somehow I got word that the Carters had planned to just have the King and Queen; just the four of them. Fortunately, I got wind of this, and the fact that that would be considered inappropriate. So I did get on the phone and I said, "This just simply will not do." So they did put on an elegant luncheon. It was in April, and it was all the White House vermeil, and the flowers were dogwood. George Vest afterwards said, "I've been coming to lunches and dinners at the White House for twenty-five years, and this was the loveliest."

Q: You had mentioned, Ambassador, that you were very interested in the passage of ERA in Georgia.

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: What sort of things did you do to help that along?

CHAMBERS: What did I do? At the time we were trying to get it passed, Mary Beth Busbee, who was the wife of our governor then, George Busbee; and Betty Talmadge-I think her husband was still Senator-and I went to the legislature a couple of times and - I've forgotten, all of us made talks. It was very discouraging because the legislators said, "If we voted for that we would never be reelected." They couldn't go back to rural Georgia and say they voted for it.

Q: So it didn't pass?

CHAMBERS: No, it didn't pass.

Q: You were, at that time, very active on the board of the bank? You said you were the first woman?



CHAMBERS: Yes. At that time it was called the Fulton National Bank. It's now the Bank of the South. Atlanta is in Fulton County and the bank was named for Robert Fulton. In the dining room there's a big picture of his steamship. They decided that it was too confining a name because they were acquiring other banks, and so it was changed.

Q: You were active on other company boards also at that time?

CHAMBERS: I was on the boards of Central Atlanta Progress and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Atlanta Music Festival Association. What else did I do then? It's really hard to remember.

Q: The reason I'm asking this is because some person whom I have spoken to about you (in fact, it was your administrative officer) boasted that you were very business-like. He thought you probably had a great deal of experience in business.

CHAMBERS: Heavens, I'm surprised at that. I didn't realize I was all that business-like-

Q: Well, he thought you were. This was Eugene Champagne, and he appreciated it. When you were asked to become ambassador, what motivations did you have to accept this position?

CHAMBERS: Excitement, first of all, really. It sounded just the most exciting thing, that would...

Q: Expand your horizons?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes. I've always loved Europe. The idea of being in a Western European country, and also of being a part of President Carter's administration, when I had been so strong for him. Right from the time of the Inauguration we all knew the things that he was going to champion; I mean human rights. To be part of that administration was a great compliment.

Q: Of course.



CHAMBERS: I told you, I think, when we last talked, that when I was leaving for Brussels, I said, "I couldn't stay away from home for four years. I'll maybe stay two years." I came here when I was twenty years old, and then we traveled during the war, but aside from that, I'd never lived anywhere else, and I couldn't imagine being away for four years. Those four years went so quickly!

Q: It really did expand your horizons, didn't it?

CHAMBERS: Oh my, yes. Plus, as I said before, I had no idea how my life would change when I came back here. I naively thought that I'd come back and my life would be the same, and it hasn't been. Well, all the wonderful things that have happened and are still happening to me, and that always surprise me, are because of those years. As I said, I don't think I would be a director of the Coca Cola company if I had just stayed here.

Q: This is very important, and I want to pursue that, but in connection with some other questions. So if you don't mind, I'd like to get back to this, taking it sequentially. When you took the Ambassador's course, did either Ambassador Black or Ambassador Armstrong preside over that?

CHAMBERS: No.

Q: Neither one of those two women were there then?

CHAMBERS: No.

Q: Did you meet Ambassador Armstrong?

CHAMBERS: In Texas, actually. I have never met Ambassador Black.

Q: Did you know Dean Rusk?



CHAMBERS: Yes; that's something; now you're reminding me: the High Museum of Art. I was involved in that. I was the first president of the Forward Arts Foundation, which was started by twelve women to promote visual art, and it has been a tremendous success. It's on the grounds of the Atlanta Historical Society. I was president of that for quite a long time. And then, "Cities in Schools." My goodness, how could I forget that? Because that started out in Atlanta as "Exodus." It's a program for teenage kids who are school dropouts. They're kids from neglected homes, and that's been one of my greatest interests. It now is based in Washington and it is called "Cities in Schools." I think they are now in twelve cities and they've been asked to come to Hawaii. So, yes, that's been a great, great interest. I was involved in the Southern Center for International Studies for quite a few years. I have now severed all relations with that organization. Then, just before I went to Brussels, I was asked to become a member of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, but I went almost immediately to Belgium, so I really couldn't participate in anything until I came back.

Q: The one in New York, you mean?

CHAMBERS: Yes. Well I can't think of anything else.

Q: That's quite a bit right there. You said you did know Dean Rusk. Did he give you any advice?

CHAMBERS: Oh, he was wonderful. The way I really knew him was he was very involved in this Southern Center for International Studies. So we had worked together on that, and he came to call on me just before I left. He had a recording to send to a member of the royal family in Belgium. Well, his advice to me was, "you're one of three American ambassadors there, but, since you're the ambassador to the King, you're the ranking ambassador. Just remember I told you." The other advice he gave was such a wise bit. I had known Tap Bennett (our ambassador to NATO) pleasantly, but not well. Rusk said, "You can lean on Tap for advice and help whenever you need it." And I leaned heavily on him. He was absolutely wonderful.

Q: Yes, I remember your telling me.

CHAMBERS: Yes, you know, when I was having trouble with the DCM. I had asked Tap to come for lunch and I was trying to think of how I could bring it up to him, and, he, in his forthright way, asked how was I finding the staff? I said, "Mostly very good, but not all-some real problem. He said, " You mean at the top?" And I said, "Exactly," and he said, "I've heard that." I said, you know, I just really don't think I can keep this man, John Ritter." And when I told him what was going on, he said, " Of course, you can't." To have that support, being such a new ambassador, was just about the most important thing that happened in the first months.



Q: Would you go over that business with Ritter a little bit?

CHAMBERS: Because of plane schedules to Brussels-at that time there was only a night flight-I would have arrived, ruffled, in early morning. I decided I didn't want to arrive that way, so I flew to Paris and rested and then came on a train. I got in late in the afternoon, with a great friend of mine, who came with me as my staff aide. She was there almost a year, and that was invaluable, too, to have someone in the house just to talk to. Anyway, we arrived at the station in Brussels and the DCM and his wife met me, and we went in and had a glass of champagne with the station master.

Q: With the station master?

CHAMBERS: Yes; and that was all. Then I went back to the residence and was introduced to the domestic staff and then John Ritter said, "Your first appointment is at a certain time tomorrow." Apparently my secretary, who was standing in as secretary and then I later requested that she remain as my secretary, said that she went to him that morning and said, "Aren't you going to go to the residence and escort the ambassador?" "Oh," he said, "she can find her way." And so that is the way it started off.

Ambassador Firestone had left nine or ten months before I was appointed, so you see John Ritter had been in charge. I think he thought, first, [with] a political appointee (I had no experience, obviously), and a woman, that he was going to continue to be in charge.

Q: He cut you out of things? He didn't tell you what was going on?

CHAMBERS: Oh, no. He would just sort of announce what was to be done. I felt, I don't know if hostility is the word, but, certainly, I didn't feel any respect.

Q: No, a terrible lack of respect.



CHAMBERS: I felt no cooperation, and I didn't feel that I was informed. As I say, he'd just say, "You're doing this and this." But the thing that really decided me, and it was a little less than two weeks because one of my first appointments was to go down and see General Haig at SHAPE: I had my schedule and it said I was going with Dick Lawrence, who was the military attaché, who I liked very much. Well, that morning Sharon, my secretary, said that Mr. Ritter was going along. I said I didn't understand that; I thought it was just Colonel Lawrence. She said he just decided he wanted to go. So when we got near Mons, the driver said, "Would you like the flags on the car?" and John Ritter said, "No, that won't be necessary." I said that I would like the flags. I realized that was just really the last straw. It was a morning appointment and then I was to stay for lunch. So I got there, and very quickly the secretary came and said General Haig would like to see me, and John Ritter got up at the same time. The aide said, "The General will see the Ambassador alone." We talked for an hour and a half and he cooled his heels. Then Al Haig said, "We'll go and have lunch," and he added, "I must say that I was quite surprised to be notified that your deputy was coming along." That was when I realized there was just no way.

But it's strange how vibes are. We've all had to fire people. Haven't you found that sometimes the situation will have been so intolerable, and then suddenly, you haven't said anything-but the first morning he ever smiled coming into my office was the morning I told him. How could he feel those vibes?

Well, about my secretary: when I was going back and forth to Washington, I was told I would have to choose a secretary; there wouldn't be one there. There were two women suggested, neither of whom I could interview, and the department recommended one woman. She was younger and apparently she spoke French, but I'd never seen her; I'd never even talked to her on the telephone. Well, she could not arrive until after I did, so Sharon Stilke was brought up from the floor below to fill in. I immediately liked her. She was from Oklahoma, and we really worked well together. The whole four years she called me, "Mrs. Ambassador." Everyone else, you know, said, "Madam." I really liked Sharon. Well, then, this other woman, Barbara, arrived, and I really didn't care for her. If I had met her I never would have selected her. Again, you see, I was such an amateur. She was very sort of prissy and uptight and she would flirt with John Ritter. I had the feeling that she didn't like working for a woman at all. I had the feeling she would have preferred a man. I felt that she was much more in his camp than in mine. Maybe if I hadn't gotten on so well with Sharon, but the difference was just striking. With Sharon, there was respect and asking me what I'd like to do. With Barbara, it was, "Well, this is the schedule." I'd say, "But I'd rather do it that way." Very soon I decided I wanted Sharon back, so I talked to Tim Towell whose secretary Sharon was. He was the protocol guy. He said if I wanted Sharon, that was fine, and he understood why I wanted her. I told John Ritter that Barbara really was not working out, and he said, "There are secretaries and there are ambassador's secretaries, and Sharon is not that." "Well," I said, "she's going to be, starting right now." She stayed the whole four years. She was just absolutely wonderful.



Q: She's devoted to you.

CHAMBERS: You just can imagine the difference it made. I told her the only thing that she ever forgot in the four years, and she was mortified by this: I wanted to sent a box of Belgian chocolates by a friend who was coming back to the US, and she forgot to have them picked up. That was the only thing.

Q: Is that right? Well, that's a pretty good record, isn't it?

CHAMBERS: Really! I talked to Tap Bennett. George Vest was my immediate boss, and Tap said, "You just tell George Vest what's going on." So that's what happened. But Tap gave me the strength to do it [to ask for Ritter's transfer].

I arrived in June and then in October, the then prime minister, Leo Tindemans, who is now the foreign minister, was going on an official visit to Washington, and so of course I went with him. When I arrived back in Brussels, I, again, arrived by train. All the officers were there; at least ten people with their wives, and I said, "But this is wonderful; what's going on?" They said, "This is the way your arrival should have been, and we all knew that." They were just appalled by John Ritter's reception of my arrival.

Q: You mentioned having called Jody Powell. He always answered you, but this particular time he called you from Air Force One. What was the problem? Can you recall why you had to get in touch with him?

CHAMBERS: Yes, I think there was a Belgian day at the Paris Air Show, and there was a Chinese official and they were talking about buying the F-16. They needed some advice from the embassy, because they didn't know which way to go. It was Dick Lawrence who was the military attaché, and we were out at the air show. So I said I would get somebody at the White House.

I guess Dick made the call; we were all sitting around. I said to ask for Jody Powell, because he was the one I would call, and we were told, "He's en route with the President to the talks in Vienna." Dick said, "Oh, dear, we really must talk with someone immediately." "Oh, well," they said, "We'll put you through to Air Force One." That was very good for all of the career people; they were very impressed that in ten minutes I got him.

Q: This is the advantage of a political Ambassador. How soon was that incident? Can you remember?



CHAMBERS: No. It must have been the following summer; at least the following summer, because the Air Show was always in June.

Q: Did you have any goals, sort of roughed out in your mind, of what you wanted to achieve while you were there?

CHAMBERS: No, no.

Q: You just wanted to tell what Carter was -

CHAMBERS: I often cut out quotations, and I was looking at one last night. It bears on what you just asked me, so let me go and get it. "I never intended anything in my life. People don't understand that, but I've just drifted in and out, in and out. I had no star that I looked for or followed. My whole life has been an event."

Q: Really. And that sums yours up, too.

CHAMBERS: Well, really, I had no star that I looked for or followed. The girls of my generation, as my roommate at school said, "Nobody ever told us to be somebody, so we didn't."

Q: So you didn't.

CHAMBERS: Really. Of course, there were some people our age who did have a star, who did have a goal.

Q: Yes, but it was the exception.

CHAMBERS: Yes. I had no thought of a career. Everything has just sort of happened.

Q: Were you given instructions by the [Belgian] desk, before you left, to pursue any particular line?

CHAMBERS: No.



Q: Nothing crucial going on at the time that you were going to have to pick up?

CHAMBERS: No, because the F16 had been settled; that was it. The last two years, though, we were, even in my embassy, as well as NATO, busy with the decision of putting missiles in Belgium.

Q: That was the big thing then?

CHAMBERS: You know the Belgians are very influenced by the Dutch Parliament, and so they wait for them to vote. Then you know how those European countries just close down in the summer. We'd say, "We really must have a decision by the 15th of July." Well, then the Prime Minister is on holiday.

Q: I know exactly what you mean. They didn't make the decision before you left, did they?

CHAMBERS: Yes, finally.

Q: They did?

CHAMBERS: Yes, but then it was tentative, depending on Holland. Tap was just totally immersed in that.

What was I going to say, something about-oh, yes, my friend, Natasha Spender, made a remark last summer-we're about the same age-talking about youth, or being the age we are, and she said, "Each era of my life has been better than the one before." And I thought about it, and I realized that I could say the same thing. I never thought in those terms at all. Again, I just relate everything BB, before Belgium and after. One thing that is sort of amusing about Coca Cola: I was elected to the board of Coca Cola, and then shortly after, Don McHenry [former US ambassador to the U.N.] was also elected. And he calls the two of us "the odd couple;" which is true. He said, "You know it was just very good timing for us that we both got out of the Foreign Service when big companies were deciding they should have a woman and a black on the board." And it was true. But, as I say, I can't believe I would have been chosen as that woman if I hadn't had that experience in Belgium.

Q: To give you that high profile.

CHAMBERS: Even though I lived in Atlanta. Well, that's just my guess.



Q: We spoke before about the presentation of credentials and how your son rode along on his bicycle and waved at you, and then we moved to the restaurant and I didn't pick up on the end of that. Could you give me a little picture of how exactly you presented the credentials? How long it took? Did you withdraw Firestone's credentials before you presented yours?

CHAMBERS: No.

Q: You did not?

CHAMBERS: Oh, no. It really was very exciting. Our residence faces the Parc Royale. At one end of the Parc is the Parliament and at the other is the palace, and so whenever a new ambassador was presenting his credentials, the horses, with the riders, went by the residence and it is the most beautiful sight. If I had a guest or guests staying and we'd hear the horses, somebody would go and knock on their door and say, "Look out the window. Here they come, all in their uniforms, with beautiful horses." The fur was brushed in a checkerboard pattern and they would just gleam. It was just marvelous. So the Grand Marechal came to escort me in the King's Mercedes, which was practically like sitting in this sofa with two chairs. It was in the morning. I wore just a short dress, but my staff were all in white tie. Q: Did you wear a hat?

CHAMBERS: No. I asked about that, but they said, no. We were received and then the King took me in the room by myself. He had really done his homework. He's very impressive; his knowledge, and such dedication. President Carter had, just before I came, made his speech at Notre Dame on human rights, and he mentioned that and he said that he hoped to meet the president, because his whole philosophy on human rights was so impressive and so the way he himself felt. I think I told you before I always felt that Carter's stand on human rights, on the Panama Canal treaty, and Camp David, all were far more appreciated in Europe than in this country.

Q: You mentioned that; yes. Don't you think as time passes they will be more and more appreciated here?

CHAMBERS: Yes, yes. Certainly, human rights will. So the King mentioned that. Then, of course, I called on the prime minister. Every person in the government mentioned that speech. Since it was June, there were several new ambassadors and the one, oh maybe a day or so after my presentation, was the ambassador from Thailand, and so at everything official we sat next to each other for four years. He had the dearest little wife. I'd never really had Thai food, so I used to go to their embassy.



So I was in Washington just a couple of weeks ago, and Perry Stieglitz, who was my cultural attach said, "The new ambassador in Thailand would like to see you. Would you come and have drinks?" I said, "Well, that's very nice, but why does he want to meet me?" He said, "It's your old friend and he's just come to Washington as Ambassador." So that's a nice reconnection. Then the interesting thing, I had gone up to Washington for the Meridian House Ball because the Coca Cola company sponsored it this year, and I mentioned the fact that that was the reason for my coming, because of Coca Cola. He said that his family was one of five families who started the first Coca Cola bottling plant in Thailand.

Q: Isn't it odd, these coincidences?

CHAMBERS: Oh yes. His brother apparently is still very active in it, so he is very anxious now to come to Atlanta to do a presentation to the Mayor and to the city, the business people. We're setting that up for the spring. I told him I'd never been to the Far East, but the Coca Cola Company's October meeting will be in Japan. I said, "I finally now will be going there, so I want to travel around and go to other countries." Oh, he said, "That's wonderful."

Q: Was there any delay to your presenting your credentials? Was that within a week of the time that you arrived?

CHAMBERS: It was, I would say, ten days. I arrived in Paris at the time of the air show and I said I would like to go to it. Well, that was a problem because I would not have presented my credentials and it would not have been proper for me to go. So I didn't do that. June was a good month, before the King went on holiday. The National Day is July 21st, so that's why there were several new ambassadors at the same time. About the first week in July, we went to tea at Leghen Palace, which is just on the outskirts, where the King and Queen actually live. They had a tea for the new ambassadors, which was very nice. I think there were about nine of us. Then I remember meeting some other new ambassadors who arrived during the summer, and, of course, they really couldn't do anything; they couldn't start attending anything, so mine was good timing.

Q: And you took your country team with you?

CHAMBERS: Yes, I remember Gene Champagne all done up in white tie.

Q: How did the Belgians react to having a woman ambassador? You were the first woman ambassador. Did they not care, because what was important is the fact that you were the [US] ambassador?



CHAMBERS: Yes, I don't think they did care. There was an article in a Brussels paper, maybe the Chamber of Commerce magazine, I can't remember what it was, but there was an article about me before I came. One of the things the article said was how much I liked shooting, and that was a great plus, because immediately I had invitations for that coming fall, and every weekend I went on these wonderful shoots. They were very pleased about that. No, I was told and I repeated it several times as a joke-the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg is the sister of King Baudouin and neither of those families have much sense of humor, so I doubt this-but the story was that the Luxembourg Royal family called and said, "If you don't want a lady ambassador, we can tell you how to get rid of her." Apparently, when a new ambassador was being appointed to Luxembourg they said, "We've had enough women. We want a man." And that's when Jim Lowenstein was appointed. But the King, supposedly said, "Oh, no, we don't object; we've never had a woman, and so that's perfectly fine."

Q: US relations with the Belgians were, as they usually are, very good at the time you arrived?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes.

Q: What was the size of the mission? How many people did you have working for you? Was it a couple of hundred?

CHAMBERS: Oh, more than that.

Q: More than that?

CHAMBERS: Yes. Does 350 sound reasonable?

Q: That sounds reasonable, yes. That big a mission?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: There are an awful a lot of Americans in Belgium, aren't there?

CHAMBERS: Oh yes, the American companies. At that time there were more than 1500 American companies. The Singer Sewing Machine Company had been there since the beginning of this century.



Q: Did you spend much of your time with the American business community?

CHAMBERS: I visited all of the big plants. The Chamber of Commerce is very anxious for the Ambassador to be involved in that. That's very important. And the Fulbright Commission, too. I was on that board; I think it's the custom for the ambassador. I was very interested in that, being educational, and Perry Stieglitz was as well, so we would go to those things together.

Q: Were you able to develop a close relationship with the prime minister? Or doesn't one do that in a country like Belgium?

CHAMBERS: They're very formal people, you know. I would say that I had a warmer relationship with [Prime Minister] Leo Tindemans than with Mr. Martens [the subsequent prime minister], and I think it was their personalities. Mrs. Tindemans was charming. I never met Mrs. Martens.

This was little amusing bit about the Belgium problem: Mr. Tindemans had been away in the summer, so I hadn't had him to dinner in the residence. We were then getting ready to go to Washington together on his visit, so I asked if he would like an official dinner or would he like to come just with his wife and my husband and me. He said he preferred that, so I asked him to come to my little house that I rented in the country, outside of Brussels. He was very pleased, because it was the last Flemish area near Brussels. It was surrounded by the French-speaking part of the country, and he was very pleased that I chose it. (It just happened that that little house was there.) I remember I served brussels sprouts and he refused to eat them because of the word "brussels."

Q: Really, they are that touchy? Was he the foreign minister?

CHAMBERS: He was the prime minister. He's now the foreign minister. I had a closer relationship with Henri Simonet, who was the foreign minister. His was the opposition party, and I was amazed when the prime minister went to Washington on that official visit, Henri Simonet as the leader of the opposition insisted on coming along. He said that their views had to be presented to the president, to the Department. To me, with our form of government, this was just amazing. You know, would the leader of the Democratic party have gone to Reykjavik? I found that very interesting.



When we got back, Henri Simonet said he wanted to invite me to come either for breakfast or lunch in his office. I said I really didn't like breakfast meetings; I would be delighted to come for lunch, so we did have lunch in his office. He has quite a sense of humor, and he said, "I understand you resisted my offer of breakfast?" And I said, " Yes, Mr. Minister, I did. I really like to have breakfast alone." He said, "I wanted to ask you to come for lunch because I feel, and this is my fault, that you have not been presented with the policies of my party. As I say, I feel it has been my fault, and I just wanted to tell you how we feel and what our differences are." I said I'd enjoyed the lunch and I hoped he would come to the residence. Well, then he was campaigning for re-election, and I thought he was probably too busy, so I didn't ask him for some time. I ran into him somewhere, and he said, "You have not returned my invitation."

Q: Blunt, isn't he?

CHAMBERS: Oh, very. I said, "Well, I just felt with the campaign that you would have said no." "Now the campaign's over," he said. So this became a regular exchange of visits. He did then come, and maybe six weeks later he would invite me back again.

Q: Do you find getting to know these people is more a question of personality than it is of what they are minister of?

CHAMBERS: To a great extent.

Q: It's a person-to-person thing?

CHAMBERS: I mean there was no reason for him to [exchange visits]; it wasn't required. Again, it's vibes. With some people there's more rapport.

Q: So the personal touch is really very, very important?

CHAMBERS: Yes, yes. And the thing you asked about how the Belgians felt, well, certainly at the beginning and, in a way, all through my years, people would constantly say, "You seem to enjoy being here so much."

Then some people, oh, after I'd been there three years, would still ask if I liked being there, if I liked my job? I would just say, I wouldn't still be here. You know that was just sort of a dumb question.



Q: I imagine the enthusiasm that you show opens a lot of doors.

CHAMBERS: Well, I would assume in any country, but maybe more in Belgium, being a small country. You know, they do have a feeling of being smaller than our other allies, like France, Germany, England.

Q: Sure. Overwhelmed.

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: So they're touchy.

CHAMBERS: Yes. I think that maybe they were more pleased and surprised by how much I liked being there.

Q: Did the press report on your activities much? The Belgian press?

CHAMBERS: Well, the custom was for the ambassador to address the first meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in the fall, and that was always reported but not to a great extent.

I don't know if I told you my terrible faux pas when President Carter came. That was very much reported, and on television. He had been, I think, to seven countries, and Belgium was his last stop. The three US ambassadors, naturally, were at the plane, and I was first in line since I was with the King. When he got off, he kissed me. The next day at my staff meeting, one of my officers said, "We were very proud to see you were the only ambassador on this trip to be kissed by the President." Well, obviously, I was the only woman. I said, "There's nothing queer about our President."

The next day was Saturday, and I was at a shoot near Antwerp and there was a man who was always kind of teasing me and sort of flirting and he said, "Oh, I know what you were up to last week." We were at lunch in the middle of the shoot, and we were speaking French. He said, "Ah, I saw you being kissed by your President as he stepped off of the plane." Then I said, in French, "Oh, yes, my country team was very proud that I was the only ambassador to be kissed by the President." Well, I said the word in French, and you know the difference between the-[In French "kiss" is a euphemism for sex.]

Q: Yes, I do.



CHAMBERS: I didn't know what I had said, and everyone was laughing. I mean there were these hoots of laughter, and my husband, who was at the other table, said, "What in the world did you say?" "Well, I said something awful."

On Monday my French teacher came. Brigitte Verbeek was a darling young Belgian woman, and we really became friends. I said, "Brigitte, your reputation is ruined. You're never going to have another pupil. This is just terrible." And when I told her, of course she turned beet red.

Q: (Laughs) Of course, she did. Well, they ought to tell you that the word baisser doesn't always means what it's supposed to.

CHAMBERS: Well, that was the worst. But, of course, that was the most widely reported occasion. Oh, and then this one: the Carters got along very well with the King and Queen, so they spent the whole day in Brussels and then they were leaving. They were going to fly back to Washington that night. The King and Queen came to the airport and the President said, "Oh, but your wife speaks the most beautiful English. This is very impressive. She speaks really without an accent." Brzezinski was standing there, and he said as a joke, "Well, you know there are a lot of people in Washington who have a hard time understanding you. You know, with your southern accent there are a lot of us who don't really get every word you're saying." President Carter laughed.

Q: You have mentioned the Chamber of Commerce in Belgium. Did they actually consult with you about business problems? Or with your economic counselor?

CHAMBERS: Yes. And Bob Kaufman was really good. He left. I lost him and I lost my political counselor, Francis De Tarr, I think in the same month. I said they were both "stolen." Francis went to the same job in the embassy at Paris. He's retired now, but his whole interest and his career has been France. He wrote a book, I think, about the liberal party in France. That has been his whole dedication, so to have that as his last post was wonderful. I couldn't argue.

Then Bob had-he was funny. He used to say he was a ladies' man, because he had worked for Anne Armstrong before me. He was asked to come back to the U.N., and his immediate boss was a woman. She wasn't the head of the mission there, because that would have been Don McHenry or Andy Young. He was terrific. As I say, there are so many American companies in Belgium, a very active Chamber of Commerce.

Q: Did you place emphasis on one particular area? How did you divide your time? On political, or public affairs, or economic development, or what was your major interest?



CHAMBERS: Well, I tried to divide my time. Incidentally, I heard that when Ambassador Price was in Belgium, he, having been a banker, was very interested in the Chamber of Commerce and the business life of Brussels.

One thing I started doing, which apparently hadn't been done, was to say to each section chief; Francis De Tarr, Bob Kaufman, Gene Champagne, each department head, "Ask who you want," and then we had sort of working lunches in the residence. The labor man, for instance, said he'd never been asked to do that. My whole staff was very pleased about that.

Q: I can imagine. Nobody ever turns down an invitation from an ambassador, so they could get people they wouldn't otherwise see.

CHAMBERS: Yes, and these were the, as they said, people who wouldn't have been invited to the Embassy otherwise. I know it was interesting for me.

I think, because of all of the American involvement in Brussels as well as the whole country, I was asked to attend openings, in the World Trade Center, and the book fair, and the automobile show; everything, because there was always an American emphasis in all of these. As I say, I went all around the country to the plants, and I loved that.

General Motors, I think, has been there fifty years. I was at a dinner with the head of General Motors in Belgium and someone asked him if the labor prices weren't terribly high in Belgium. He said, "Yes, they are, but the quality of workmanship is also very high." But then, of course, particularly the last two years, we had to face the fact that some American companies were moving to the Far East, because they had to. I mean, computers . . .

Q: Yes, I understand that in the north of Belgium they had a flourishing computer business; high tech.

CHAMBERS: Yes. Of course, the Belgians would just moan. We all just dreaded each announcement. They had no choice. To be able to compete, they had to be able to pay the same lower wages.

But big companies like General Motors and Ford do feel the quality of workmanship is so high that it's worth the cost of labor. At least they did. I don't know if they've changed since I've left but I really enjoyed going around all those.



Then, of course, my interest in the arts and all of that may well have been partly because of Perry Stieglitz. Again, it was vibes. I told him he made working fun because he had such enthusiasm. We just shared so many interests. He said I gave more attention to that than maybe had been done before by some other ambassadors, particularly men, I guess. A lot of that, really, was not only by choice but on my after-hours. For every American entertainer who came, Jessye Norman, Isaac Stern, I always had a dinner or a reception.

Q: Did you feel Washington gave you a free hand?

CHAMBERS: You mean financially?

Q: No, I know that you spent your own money, but did they give you a free hand in what you could do?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Did you feel that you got enough policy guidance from Washington?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: We know you had access to the President, and I suppose Belgium being where it is, you had a awful lot of CODELS [Congressional delegations] didn't you?

CHAMBERS: Yes. We had every member of the cabinet come.

Q: Every member of the cabinet?



CHAMBERS: We did have a lot of CODELs and often on long weekends; Labor Day or Easter or something like that. People used to say, "You must get tired of those." Well, I didn't, because I felt it was so important that they come and visit SHAPE and understand about NATO. There were so many governors, congressmen, just groups who would say: "But we had no idea what NATO was all about; what it's doing and how wonderful this is." Wives, as well as husbands. I often had to cancel [other] plans for weekends, but, again, that was part of the job. I met Senator [Howard] Baker; I was impressed with him. The one now I'm reading so much about since the election, Senator Byrd from West Virginia, he addressed a group from Parliament and he was marvelous. He was so on the ball and bright and concerned, he was just very, very impressive. And then every year in Brussels was the Foreign Ministers' NATO Conference, and then the Defense Ministers, so our Secretary of State would come and our Secretary of Defense.

Q: Did those visits always go smoothly? Your staff would handle them?

CHAMBERS: Well, no. You see, it really wasn't our staff; it would have been Tap Bennett's staff.

Q: Would it? I wondered how you divided up the entertaining with the other two ambassadors.

CHAMBERS: For those two conferences, they would do the entertaining, and I would be asked to come. I met all of them at the airport. I knew the Vances, but that was Tap's department. The last two years, almost two years, our ambassador to the European Community was Tom Enders. Now he is retired from the Foreign Service and he has joined Salomon Brothers.

Q: Were consular matters a major problem? American welfare?

CHAMBERS: Not really. Well, it was an on-going concern. Oh, I remember one thing that happened. It must have been August and there was a airline with cheaper fares, and it went bankrupt, so there were all these Americans just stranded, and they literally didn't have any place to sleep. Some of the young ones had no money. They had thought, "We're going home Thursday, so we just need enough money till then." That was a terrible, terrible problem.

Q: What did you do?

CHAMBERS: Well, we found places for them to stay, and in some instances gave them enough money. Our embassy had to find other flights for them, and you see they'd chosen these flights because of the price, so they didn't want go on others. Oh, that was awful. That was one problem. Are consul generals sometimes sort of a problem to the ambassador? I mean, they become too -



Q: They can be. Yes.

CHAMBERS: John Hyman was there and his wife Judy worked in our mission to the European Community. They were really wonderful. He was in Antwerp. There, again, I became very friendly with them. Then they left. I can't remember the man who came, but he was sort of a little king, I think.

Then something happened. It was the wonderful pageant in Bruges; the Holy Blood, and the procession of the Holy Blood. We were told that we couldn't drive up to the stand. All the streets were blocked off, so I walked and the heir to the throne, Prince Albert, and his sister, arrived on foot. I mean everyone did, all the other ambassadors. We were all sitting there, and just before the pageant began, a black car came up and it had the American flag on it. It was our consul general. Of course, everyone teased me. I had arrived on foot along with the Royal family, and he came by car. He wasn't embarrassed at all.

Q: As you say, sometimes they get a bit of a superiority complex.

CHAMBERS: The department used to own a house. They sold it, oh, a long time ago. The Hymans were in an apartment that really wasn't adequate, because they were very good at entertaining. Antwerp, you know, Flanders, now is the economic power. It really was a hardship for them. I just can't remember the man who replaced them. He felt that the consulate should have a residence, and he was right; they shouldn't have sold the one before, because it was poor economy. So I did help him, making calls to Washington. Then at one point there was talk of closing that consulate. Well, that, really would be disastrous as far as PR in that country. So we protested that. That would be worse than Nice, because Nice, is to such a great extent, tourism, and Antwerp, of course, is not.

Q: Did you have any intra-mission rivalries that you were aware of, say, between your political and economic section, or between your economic and your CIA, or whatever?

CHAMBERS: Again, I think it's a question of personalities. I think everyone managed it very well.

Q: Who kept you informed of any problems of a personal nature at the Embassy? You might, for example, have had problems of alcoholism. I don't know that you did.



CHAMBERS: There was one after Gene Champagne left and Larry Russell had replaced him. My friend, too. He was the one who handled it and he was terrific. Another who helped with problems was Tim Towell. He was my great support in getting rid of John Ritter. His wife had gone to school with my daughter and partly because of that and perhaps because he was from Ohio, he was the person who would speak more freely to me my first weeks there. And that was tremendously helpful.

Emily White, my friend, who was my staff aide, became very friendly with the Towells. They could say things to her about the behavior of John Ritter. Tim was the one who really spoke out so. When John Ritter was leaving, I said, "Who is going to replace him?" Well, Art Olsen was the political counselor, and so it was Tim's suggestion that Art could take over.

Well, then he became very macho. I told you the story of the day the hostages were taken in Iran and he didn't tell me that. He didn't tell me that same month a mosque was bombed, you remember?

Q: I do indeed. In Mecca, wasn't it?

CHAMBERS: Yes, he didn't tell me anything about it. He was very male-chauvinist, and that was a disappointment.

Q: This developed slowly, did it? You started out all right?

CHAMBERS: Yes, yes. Well, I was so relieved to have someone to replace John Ritter. Then the prime minister's mother died, and he did not tell me when the funeral was. As I say, I had gone to Washington with the Tindemans. I didn't know about the funeral. In the next few days someone said that there had been criticism; that whoever was sent by the embassy the Belgians felt was not important enough. Well I would have gone. It was just this sort of thing, so when this thing with the hostages happened, I couldn't put up with that. Again I talked with Tap and I said, "I know that George Vest is a good friend of Art Olsen," and Tap said, "Yes, but he's too much a professional to let that interfere." I went to see George in Washington, and I said, "This is awful to be coming a second time."

Q: What period of time is involved in this? Another year or two years?

CHAMBERS: Two, I guess, at the most. Because then Ed Keller came and we really worked well together, because he was cooperative and respectful, but he was very firm in saying what he thought. I mean, he wasn't just -



Q: A yes man?

CHAMBERS: No, not just a yes man. But anyway, when Gene Champagne was leaving, and Larry Russell was being sent to Brussels, apparently George Vest told him the story of me and the DCM and said, "I want you to go and find out what this is all about." And Larry said, "I think it's either the ravings of a madwoman or else it's the most disgraceful behavior I've ever heard of toward an ambassador. I will go and give you my opinion on which it was."

He told me this later and he said it was the most disgraceful behavior he'd ever heard of in his years in the Foreign Service.

Q: Is he the gentleman who played Santa Claus for you?

CHAMBERS: Yes, yes. He was divorced and his two children were living with him. He was marvelous; he was the one who kept me abreast about people, and he was very, very good.

Q: Did you have any serious problems with your personnel at all? Did you have to send people home, or evacuate people?

CHAMBERS: The only thing was that Sharon became ill, and then she had to be flown to Frankfurt [for treatment].

So I remember Susan Miller had become my staff aide, and we were trying to find out when Sharon was going. We really thought she was dying, she had lost so much weight, and I said, "Well I'm going to Frankfurt. She cannot die there alone." That was a problem.

Q: Did you go to Frankfurt?

CHAMBERS: No. She got better, and I don't know; I've forgotten.

Q: She's very grateful to you for that entire time. She said you saved her life.



CHAMBERS: Well the interesting thing, she very much wanted to go back to Dallas, which was near the town where her parents lived. She finally was well enough to go on a stretcher. They didn't know what it was, they thought they had corrected it. Soon she came back to work, and oh, I remember how thin she was. She was always skinny anyway, and her face was just bone. And then it started up again, in the middle of the night. All they could do-they couldn't even get as far as SHAPE, so they just went to an emergency room in a Belgian hospital. There was a doctor who had been in Zaire and he finally found it was a microbe she had contracted in Zaire. He said American doctors would not even be aware of this.

Then her husband and children were checked. She said, "But we've been gone from Zaire for two years," and he said, "But these stayed."

Q: Incubated.

CHAMBERS: Incubated, but this particular one attacks the liver and that's what's caused all the trouble,-so it was lucky for her she was in Belgium. It was amazing really. Well, I don't remember any other problems like that.

Q: Did you feel part of the Service? Did you, after awhile, begin to feel you were part of the Foreign Service yourself? Part of the family?

CHAMBERS: Yes, I did. Yes, because you get so interested in it. If someone is leaving to go to another post, you just listen to all of them talk.

Q: Yes. It does sort of become a family, doesn't it?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes. Phil Alston, who was in Australia-we would talk together and we were both, just from the beginning, so impressed with the dedication and how hard people in the Foreign Service work. I don't think it's recognized enough. And certainly it's not done for money. The embassy children would say they'd go home to wherever they came from and their friends would say, "You have such a glamorous life." Of course it's such a wonderful life, and I think for their children it is. But some of them, particularly Lorna and Bill Ramsay and Sharon told me they realized very soon that when they'd go home, they'd be so full of what they'd been doing they couldn't wait to tell their families, and the families really had no interest. And that was very disappointing.

Q: That's right. There's no point of connection. You very soon learn not to mention it.



CHAMBERS: That's what they said, and that this was very disappointing; that their parents, particularly weren't interested. Then, of course, when the hostages were taken, their parents really wanted them to come home. That was very demoralizing.

Q: I can imagine. Although Belgium was hardly the Middle East.

CHAMBERS: No. You asked did I feel part of the family? There were a couple of Marines taken hostage who were known to my staff and I felt terrible. The Marines were so darling to me.

Q: Tim Towell spoke to me of successes with the Chinese while you were there, and he mentioned particularly that your husband helped in that he was very good at talking to them. Can you remember what this was all about?

CHAMBERS: That's good that Tim mentioned that, because it's interesting. When I arrived, we didn't have formal relations with China, and the ambassador at that time, oh, he was so stiff. And not only he was always in a Mao jacket, but his wife was as well, and she always spoke of him as "my comrade."

Q: Oh dear.

CHAMBERS: I mean, they were obviously so anti-capitalist, he could barely even say hello. Then he went home and he was replaced. Of course, we all wondered who was coming next. The new one came to call on me and he really was pretty much the opposite. He was a big man and very friendly. Tim worked very hard, that was one of his areas, working with the Chinese ambassador. Oh, I know what happened. He wanted to make an appointment to call on me and Tim said, "You're going to find this ambassador different from the other one." I think maybe Tim suggested, or maybe I did, that I ask him for tea instead of coming to the embassy, because of this strange relationship. When I asked him to come for tea he asked if he could bring his wife. Well, he was pleased to see that I had some Oriental things, and I had a terra cotta camel that I have in France now, and he said, "Oh, that was one of the things that used to be buried with a high priest."

Then he said he understood that I liked Chinese food and I said I absolutely loved it, so they had us to a dinner. It was the Ambassador and his wife and his deputy and his wife, and the Towells and my husband and myself. We would sit at a round table and have a lazy Susan with all of these marvelous things on it. He would ladle out the soup and I remember one time, he ladled out something and I asked, "Oh, what is this?" And he said, "It's sea slugs. It's very good; it's very beneficial for elderly gentlemen. It makes them young again; very spirited."



I said, "Oh, good, give me some more. Does it do the same for elderly ladies?" Well, he had a sense of humor. He said, "Oh, that's wonderful. You may just run back to your Embassy instead of riding."

I got a call about three one morning saying that we were establishing formal relations with China, so, of course, I called him first thing in the morning, and he was very, very pleased about this. I said, "Now I can have an official dinner for you." Which I did. And he never missed a National Day celebration, and I never did either.

That's really one reason we became so friendly. He'd say how appreciative really small countries were, and he said, "You know, other ambassadors need not go, but if the American and the Chinese ambassadors come, that is a great compliment. It was known that the Russian ambassador never went anywhere. He never came to mine; always an excuse.

Q: Well, Tim said that your work with the Chinese was very fruitful; very good. What was your preferred type of entertainment? Working luncheons or formal dinners or receptions?

CHAMBERS: I really liked all of it.

Q: You liked a mixture?

CHAMBERS: I really did, yes.

Q: I suppose they served different functions?

CHAMBERS: Yes. Well, I liked to entertain, but not just for entertaining. I just met such interesting people.

Q: When you gave the businessmen's luncheons, was it at all awkward that you were the only woman present?

CHAMBERS: No. Sometimes there would be one or two others; members of the staff. No, I really never felt awkward, and I don't think the men did.

Q: Did the Foreign Service inspectors come while you were there?



CHAMBERS: Yes, they did. Oh, I can remember everybody shaking. Then there were three women who came and they said, "We've been sent to see how the new ambassadors are doing. They were very honest about being sent out to appraise political ambassadors. I had many receptions. I remember a group of American doctors. There were such interesting people in this group.

Q: After your friend went back to the States, you had somebody else who was assigned as your staff-I don't know what they call them.

CHAMBERS: Susan Miller, whose husband was at our mission to the European Community, and she was just wonderful. I interviewed her, and she was with me until they were sent back to Washington and then he left the Foreign Service.

Q: Did she take over in setting up these parties and choosing the menus and all that sort of thing?

CHAMBERS: Not the menus; we would do that together. She did what an ambassador's wife would do, coping with domestic staff, but I would say what I wanted. I mean, we would look at the menus, but all the personality problems and the place cards-she didn't do seating arrangements for dinners. Elizabeth Courtin was our Belgian protocol secretary, and she was highly thought of in other embassies. Ambassadors' wives used to say that they envied me her. She's still there. She was marvelous because she came to every dinner.

Q: Did you inherit your chef from the Firestones, or did you engage your own people?



CHAMBERS: Josie, the maitre d' was there, and he stayed the whole time. The Firestones had brought a cook, a French cook, and he retired to the south of France. A cook had been put there, and she just wasn't good at all. I said particularly in Belgium there has to be a good chef. Then we got a resume of one who said she'd worked for Ambassador Bruce. I couldn't get in touch with Evangeline Bruce, but I said, "I've had lunch at their house in Washington and it was marvelous, so let's try her." Oh, it was just terrible! Later on, I saw Evangeline, and she said, "I can't believe she told you she was the embassy cook. She cooked for the children in the nursery. Good heavens, she could never handle official dinners." Tap Bennett was away, so instead of calling on him at NATO, I called on his deputy, Ed Streater, who had been chosen by Kingman Brewster to come and be his deputy in London. I said to Tim, who was helping me in this dilemma, "I had the most delicious lunch," and he said (the Streators were great friends of the Towells), "I'm glad to hear you say that because Gian-Carlo, the chef, doesn't want to stay on with Ed Streater's replacement. They have five little children and he's afraid he'd be making hamburgers and peanut butter sandwiches." Gian-Carlo was really young, oh, 22 or 23. He was Italian, but he had his training in Brussels. He stayed the whole time, and he was wonderful. The Rogers [General Bernard Rogers, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, SHAPE] are amazing because their cooks are all from the American military.

Q: I know; they never have to worry.

CHAMBERS: Oh, but they have to train these people. I mean, it's a worry as to what kind of cooking they do. I spent a couple of days with them in May. They have had different cooks; and I said, "If anything, your food gets better. There is no better food." Bernie said, "We made up our minds when we came to Belgium that we were going to have food that the US and the Army wouldn't be ashamed of." But that's Ann Rogers. She makes everything seem so easy.

Q: What do you consider to have been your major successes when you were in Belgium?

CHAMBERS: Oh, dear, what a question! Well, as every ambassador knows, the purpose of being there is to promote, not only good, but maybe improve the relations between the two countries, so I would like to think I'd done that.

Did I mention Sabena? Jimmy Carter had gone on a trip to Belgium when he was Governor, so he knew that Sabena wanted to establish a direct route, Brussels-Atlanta.

Just when I arrived in Belgium is when the heat was on; they had decided that the time had come. They had the money for the planes and everyone, starting with the King, would say, "Well, of course, this is going through, isn't it?"



The FAA had to [give approval] so I would try to explain that. They would reply, "Oh, your President is aware of this and you're a friend of his."

I really sweated out that summer because I said if this hadn't gone through, I would have been the culprit, and I didn't want to go home. I got a lot of credit for [the eventual approval] and I didn't deserve it. [Sabena] is owned by the government, so they cared very deeply. [The approval] was not because of me, but it was a plus [for me], a mark of success. After the King and Queen had gone to Washington, I went to call on the King. President Carter had sent him a book, so I gave it to him and he opened it. It was a book about the South. He looked at it and said, "I have something for you." I couldn't imagine what it was. He walked over to a table and there was a long box containing a decoration. It was the second highest order of the Ordre de la Couronne. It's one of those big beautiful things you wear with sashes, and I was just overcome. I was only the second American ambassador to ever receive it. William Burden had received it. That was just staggering.

Q: It shows that in King Baudouin's eyes you certainly were successful.

CHAMBERS: I don't know of any great successes.

Q: Did you feel you left anything unresolved when you left?

CHAMBERS: No, not really, because we had been so concerned over the missiles, and it was such a relief that that was settled. No, I left with happy thoughts. People would say, "If President Carter's reelected, would you stay on?" I really wouldn't have. I think four years is a very good length. No Belgians could say, "You really didn't like it here." So in that way, it was good.

Q: How many parties a week did you go to or give, Ambassador? Every night? Five nights out of the seven?

CHAMBERS: Not that many. Now the Rogers either come to Brussels or they give something, I bet, five nights a week. There are 86 embassies so there were all those national days. There would often be two on the same evening. Sometimes they were at noon, but the majority were in the evening, so I'd often go to one or two and then to a dinner. I enjoyed that.

Q: You went to all the national days?

CHAMBERS: Yes.



Q: Several people have mentioned to me that you did that; it's quite a feather in your cap that you did, because they're not all that enjoyable.

CHAMBERS: No; but the small African countries [parties] were. Plus, information that I picked up. It's not just appearing and signing the book, it's things I'd hear. I may have mentioned when I first got there I thought I had to go over to the chancery in the morning at the same time the other people arrived. Tim said, "This is ridiculous. Most of the other people who work in the embassy go home at six o'clock and put their feet up, that's when you get dressed to go out. Your day doesn't end till midnight. It's ridiculous for you to think you have to come in at nine o'clock."

So that was really a help. Then I could talk to Susan Miller and then Lorna about the menu before going to my office.

Q: Thinking along those lines, what role does the family of an ambassador play? It's quite different if a man has a wife and she handles the house; then he can concentrate his energies on the chancery. In your case, you were both, so to speak, so you had people to help you in the home. Did your family play any sort of a role? Did your children or husband pick up on any of those things?

CHAMBERS: The children never lived there.

Q: They didn't? They just visited?

CHAMBERS: They came in the summer and at Christmas and they loved it. It really was a wonderful experience for them. They all loved it. Each Christmas, I would say, "Do you want me to come back to Atlanta?" They would say, no, they'd prefer to come to Belgium. My husband was very good at social things but he was quite passive. He honestly didn't really help.

Q: So you really didn't get any help, any support, from your family?

CHAMBERS: No.

Q: That seems to be the way with so many of these women: either they have no family or the family isn't able to help them.



CHAMBERS: I have become friends with the Irwins in New York, Jack and Jane Irwin, and when he was our ambassador in Paris, he was a widower. Now, of course, he is married to Jane, and I said to her, "Oh, how sad for him that you weren't there to help him." He says, too, what a difference it would have made. She's a very sparkly little Texas lady, and she said, "Plus, I would have loved it so." It would be, I would think, very difficult for a man ambassador without a wife.

Q: Well, equally difficult for a woman, but women are more used to handling these things. It's a full time job for an ambassadress (Ambassadress-the wife of an ambassador, not a woman ambassador.). It really is.

CHAMBERS: One thing, an ambassadress can go to more tea parties and things like that. I know they have the time for that.

Q: That's their role, of course. There is one dimension of overseas life for the staff that is not accomplished, if there is no wife of an ambassador, and that is the role that the wife plays in the American women's organizations or the local women's clubs. Sometimes the DCM's wife is able to do it, but more and more DCM's wives work also.

CHAMBERS: I know that Ciela Olsen enjoyed that with the American Women's Club.

Q: Did she? So, in a sense, she took care of that part of it for you?

CHAMBERS: Yes. She did like that. I always had a Christmas party for all the children; that's when Larry Russell was Santa Claus. The first year Gian-Carlo made these beautiful dainty little cookies, and Tim or Dane Towell told me after that that the American kids didn't like those. The next Christmas they asked if the mothers could bring brownies and chocolate-chip cookies. They were very cute, and it became sort of a festivity for the mothers, and they would spend two days decorating and they'd all bring the cookies. They'd come the day before, and we'd have just sandwiches for them, but it became an annual event.

Q: How nice. Well, your staff still speaks of your parties and the fact that you invited every body. It really meant a great deal to them.



CHAMBERS: Once every child had been picked up and this one little boy was left, and he was looking very forlorn when his father finally picked him up. They had been in Belgium quite a while. The father asked, "Oh, did you have a good time?" And he said, "No, nobody there but a lot of American kids." The father said, "I realized it was time to go back to Washington."Q: You entertained your locals, too, didn't you?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: You had everybody, so nobody was left out, including communicators, who so often get overlooked.

CHAMBERS: I know. Then we'd send them cookies if there was something, and then the marines, as I told you, on holidays, because I really was appalled to hear that they had no cook on every holiday.

Q: Now when you finished and came back, did you find difficulty getting back to an ordinary life in America?

CHAMBERS: Yes. Before I came back, some months before I came back, a couple of people from our art museum came and said they were starting a huge fund-raising to build the new museum.

Q: The High Museum [in Atlanta]?

CHAMBERS: Yes. And now we have the new one. Richard Maier is the architect. I was asked if I would head that up, and I decided to say yes, because I felt that it would be a let-down to come back. That really occupied me for, oh, I guess, nine months.

Q: So you had a decompression chamber to go into.

CHAMBERS: Then, you know, I had my house in France by that time. The first summer was when Roberto Goizueta, who is chairman of Coca Cola, had been working on that fundraising, so when I left for the summer, I thought everything was pretty well done and organized. I had a phone call one day saying Mr. Goizueta wanted to speak to me. I thought it was something about that, and so I said, "Has something gone wrong? What's going on?"



He said no; he wanted to ask when I was coming back to Atlanta. I said, not for a month or so. And he said, "Oh, dear, I'm sorry. I had something I wanted to ask you in person, but I guess I'll have to do it on the phone." That's when he asked if I'd become a director of the Coca Cola company.

My sister and brother-in-law were worried about me coming back to Atlanta. Atlanta is not like New York or Washington, but there's a lot more going on there than I would say in most other American cities. Our governor, George Busbee, went to Europe quite a few times, and to the Orient, bringing businesses. We have the largest zipper factory in the world from Japan, and our Mayor, Andy Young, who I supported since he first ran for Congress, is really committed to making Atlanta more international. When anyone interesting comes, I meet him or I'm asked to have him. So I feel lucky to live there.

But I did decide, about two years ago, that I wanted an apartment in New York, because I had been staying at the River Club for a long time and I realized that I was spending more and more time there. I'm more and more so glad I have that. When I told my sister, she said, "We're just surprised you didn't get one before. We just felt that you would." And, really, I can't say I couldn't stay here. I like the New York part of my life.

Well, for instance, last week-I'm now a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and there was a lunch last week for the new French Minister of Culture. And so, again, it's all these reconnections. I'm going next week to the French-American Foundation to hear Julia Child speak. Usually it's someone from the French government or a former ambassador, and so this is really going to be fun, but there's just all sorts of things.

Q: It really keeps you on your toes. Looking back, can you think of anything you wish you had done differently as an ambassador? Or earlier in your life, perhaps?

CHAMBERS: What would I have done differently as an ambassador? I don't know. I'm sure if you had asked me that when I just left, I would have thought of lots of things.

Q: Nothing of any great substance, in other words?

CHAMBERS: No; I don't think so. I don't think I would have done less of the things I did; I really don't.

Q: In your own mind, you are satisfied with your performance?

CHAMBERS: I think so.



Q: Would you have, perhaps, gone into politics earlier?

CHAMBERS: I can't imagine that. One thing, I believe very much in therapy and counseling and I said to someone not long ago-well, I was talking to my son and daughter-in-law-and I said, "I think you're so lucky that there are now people to go to and talk." I mean, there are marriage counselors, there are psychologists. I said, "When I was your age, there were only psychiatrists, and that was for people who were really, really off the deep end." I really wonder if I had grown up in this generation how different my life might have been.

What would I have done differently in my life? As I said, I never had a goal or a star. I was married when I was twenty. The war came along. I had children. I mean, it just all rolled along. And then I became interested in supporting political candidates, after my second marriage. When I first came to Atlanta I worked in the Junior League. And I told you this: I think the only thing my father was really proud of was when I was taken into the Peachtree Garden Club. I was the only Yankee to become president. Well, the first Yankee.

I think my life must have been so dull, but I enjoyed having young children. I enjoyed all of those years. And my second marriage has really been a happy one for a long time. So I think I have to agree with [my friend] Natasha that each era of my life has been better than the one before. But now when I come back here, I like to see my contemporaries, my first friends I had when we were all twenty together, but as I said to my daughter, who lives here, "Oh, when I think of their lives compared to mine." Of course, they wouldn't like mine any more than I would like theirs. They never have lived anywhere else, except maybe in the war.

What I wish I had done: I was very inhibited, maybe by nature and upbringing. I feel that I was so inhibited. That I would have changed. Because now I've become less and less so, and it's a more comfortable way to be.

Q: Are there any characteristics that women have that men do not have, in your opinion, that makes women more effective as ambassadors in certain ways?

CHAMBERS: Well, maybe more compassion in a certain way, as far as personalities and thinking about families goes. Although my father had that to such a degree-oh, goodness, he was always-he would meet the son of an employee who had terrible teeth and he'd say, "Why haven't you had your teeth fixed?" And they'd say, "We can't afford it." So Daddy would pay to have the teeth done.



Q: I wondered if women perhaps "get away with" more than men? They could ask the tough questions without threatening other people?

CHAMBERS: Probably.

Q: Because they're not perceived as being as threatening?

CHAMBERS: No; that's true I think. It's still almost a novelty for a woman to be an ambassador, so I think we can get away, probably, with more. But I don't know what qualities a man would not have. I think, in my case, the Belgians were pleased that I did some things that men would like, such as the shooting, because not many women in Belgium shoot. They were so pleased that I liked to do that and that I could hit some birds. Of course, in that country, we'd go out on a day like this. We would always have rubber boots and a cape, and whether it was raining or not, you went shooting. But that was just the opposite of "being feminine."

Q: That's true. But also it was noteworthy because you are a woman, so in a way it isn't the opposite.

CHAMBERS: That was a plus, but they would have been pleased if any man ambassador liked it. Particularly, I guess, they were surprised. As Tim said, "You can often learn more walking down a country road with another ambassador with a gun over your shoulder than at a formal dinner or reception."

I remember when Margaret Thatcher was elected the first time. Someone said, "Aren't you thrilled that there's a woman Prime Minister?" And I said, "Only if she's a good one." I don't think you should just say there should be twenty women ambassadors.

Q: Well, what do you consider to be the most significant achievements in your life to date? Do you consider that being an ambassador one of them?

CHAMBERS: Yes. Someone said something about becoming an ambassador and I said, "I was just lucky that someone whom I had supported politically happened to become president of the United States." And Kathy, my younger daughter, said, "No, it wasn't just luck. Everything that you've done from the time you were twenty has all been one step after another: the Junior League, then the Foreward Arts, and all that." Well, I really hadn't thought of them that way.

Another was being able to help Jimmy Carter. Certainly having been an ambassador; it was just a wonderful experience. And it was, in a sense, luck, because if I hadn't known the President, this never would have happened, but my life has been significant.



I guess the fact that the companies that our father started have grown and grown and grown. My sister and I now are the only two of our generation, and my brother-in-law does run the companies, so we had to make the decisions. We didn't milk the companies; we really go to the other extreme. So I'm very proud of those companies.

Q: You say your brother-in-law handles them. Do you have any input into them?

CHAMBERS: Oh, yes. I'm chairman of Atlanta Newspapers. We have to make decisions, but he is the operator.

Q: I see. He's the day-to-day man?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Let's get back to where we started out. Since being an ambassador, you are on the board of Coca Cola, which, you have said, would not have happened before. I infer from that you find your opinions are more valued than they were before you went?

CHAMBERS: I feel that having been an ambassador has raised my stature.

Q: Do you find that you are treated in a different way?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Given more respect, perhaps?

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: How about your opinions? Are they more listened to than they used to be?

CHAMBERS: Oh, goodness! Maybe they're asked more.

Q: So there is quite a bit of cachet, of power, surrounding the title of ambassador?



CHAMBERS: Yes. Again, as Don McHenry said, he and I were in luck. Well, I believe so in timing in life, that things come along at certain times. Some people have ill timing. Poor Hubert Humphrey; everything was badly timed. And I feel all these things have come along at a time for me to take advantage. Certainly, for anyone to be an ambassador does, I think, raise one's stature. I don't think all ambassadors continue to be active. For instance, Philip Alston really has retired to Sea Island, but he didn't have a family business. He wasn't a woman just when the Coca Cola Company felt they wanted one. I think anyone, in any profession, just being interested in varied experiences-brings great rewards. Everything just leads to other wonderful and exciting things. As I say, I'm just constantly surprised. I'm always feeling a bit like Cinderella.

Q: Your sister is not as active as you are?

CHAMBERS: Not at all. She raises cattle and horses. But she's really never been involved in supporting political candidates. We were so thrilled by our Senate victory here in Georgia because Wyche Fowler, our new Senator, has been our Congressman for quite a few years and he defeated the incumbent. As someone in Washington said to me, not long ago, "It's disgraceful Georgia has the reputation of having the finest Senator, Sam Nunn, and the worst. Wyche was definitely the underdog and he won by 51-49 percent; so that was just wonderful.

Q: It certainly is. Are you still interested in the women's movement?

CHAMBERS: Well, no, I would say I'm not. As I said, at that particular time, the ERA was-I'm certainly interested in equality, but I'm not involved in it.

Q: Do you feel that women have made pretty good progress?

CHAMBERS: I do. I know a lot of people disagree. One thing that I just don't see the need for, and some friends of mine do, is this museum in Washington for women painters. A painter is a painter. I have tried to stay so far away; I have been approached to give money and I just don't approve of it. I see no reason. I think, as someone said, it's going backwards.

Q: Well, it is, isn't it? Because the minute you say that you have to be a woman to get in, you are categorizing; you are pulling them out of the mainstream.

CHAMBERS: Yes. I mean, Rosa Bonheur-her paintings are supposed to come out of the Louvre and go in a museum just with other women painters. As I say, that is going backwards.



The daughter of Roberto Goizueta apparently has inherited her father's brilliance and drive, and someone was complimenting her. She's a lawyer. He was beaming like a proud father and said, "Yes, yes; that's true." And I said, "Now, where did she get all that? Just teasing him. And he said, "Oh, too bad she's not a man." I said, "Roberto, she doesn't have to be a man in 1986." And I really feel that way.

I think women, not only women ambassadors, we're like Avis, we have to try harder to prove ourselves. I do think that.

Q: At our first meeting, you spoke to me of the four men who had been very important and instrumental in your life: Do you want to elaborate on that? We didn't go into it that at that time.

CHAMBERS: Well, my father, I guess, the things he believed in, the way he lived his life. Would I have been as interested in politics-who knows? And yet, he never said, "You should do that." I mean, never. Was it osmosis? He required, I think, a great deal of us. I remember him saying when I was really a little girl that if I failed a grade in school, it would be a disgrace to the family. And yet that didn't bother my sister at all. She was always totally uninhibited, so it had to be my nature to an extent.

Q: I think the point you are making was that men were your examples, rather than women. You mentioned Carter and, I believe, the man who taught you to shoot.

CHAMBERS: Yes; that's right. I feel Jimmy Carter changed my life by making me an ambassador. My life has been completely different. And then Fred Palmer, who-I said to someone after he died, "He did far more than just teach me to shoot. In a strange way, he gave me a self-confidence I never had before." And when I told my friend this-he had known and loved Fred as I did-he said, "I'm so glad you realize that, because I've known it for a long time."

And then a friend whom I met who had been in Provence before I. He died a year ago; his name was Rory Cameron. I'd heard his name for years and I loved everything I ever heard about him. I never thought, not only that I would meet him, but that we would become the greatest of friends. When I say that I think I've learned more from him than anyone, and people ask how. Not only because he was such a gardener, and what he did to his houses was so wonderful; his whole philosophy and the way he lived.

Q: He loved beauty, didn't he?



CHAMBERS: Yes, and in every way. He had a boyish enthusiasm. Someone said, "Well, you learned about life." I guess that's it. I think he changed my taste. I used to say he poisoned my mind about something and then I would think, oh, dear, that's terrible. But just the fun I had with him, really. I just felt I had more rapport with him than either of my husbands. About readings; we went on a trip to Turkey; I mean just being with him. He certainly wasn't trying to teach me anything.

Q: He worked with you on your Sutton Place apartment, didn't he?

CHAMBERS: Yes, and he'd never done anybody's house. Yes. He did a few things here in Atlanta, but then he got sick. No; my apartment is really a hundred percent Rory. Again, we had such fun going to London and going to Paris and, again, I learned so much. I'd say, "Well, now, Rory, do you like that? What about that?" He'd say, "Yes, but it's just not quite good enough." And that, I have thought so often of that expression with people in situations: "It's just not quite good enough."

Q: It's interesting how each one has given you another dimension.

CHAMBERS: Yes.

Q: Well, I thank you very much for your patience and all your cooperation.

CHAMBERS: It's been wonderful.

(addendum by Mrs. Chambers - July 1987)

Jim Lowenstein and I both serve now on the Board of Trustees of the La Coste ½ School of the Arts in France, so I see him often. A couple of weeks ago, Ann and Bernie Rogers and Tap and Margaret Bennett dined with me in New York. I serve on the Board of the American Ditchley Foundation, of which Cy Vance is Chairman, so that the reconnecting continues. And now my family and I spend Christmas in the countryside of Provence rather than the Belgian countryside.

End of interview